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THE CHRISTIAN CHARACTER

BY

R. E. ROBERTS, M.A.; HON. C.F.

WITH A FOREWORD BY

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To

KATHARINE CLAYTON, O.B.E.

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PREFACE

THESE Addresses and Sermons contain the substance of the message that I have recently tried to pass on to others—the former when as Diocesan Secretary of the Christian Evidence Society it has been my privilege to speak in the open air to whomsoever would stop and listen; the latter for the most part when conducting a parochial mission. The whole series is an attempt to teach the Christian Faith and show its relevance to human life. The appeal of Religion to-day lies less in intellectual arguments or the prestige of tradition than in the lives of its adherents and its effectiveness in world affairs. It is in the very nature of Christianity to respond to this modern demand, for its truths are inseparable from conduct and character.

I am much indebted to my neighbour the Rev. David Phillips, B.D., for reading the manuscript and making helpful suggestions.

R. E. R.

ASHWELL RECTORY,
OAKHAM.

FOREWORD

IT would seem that the problem to-day in the material world is that of distribution rather than production. Wealth is now created more easily than ever before, but the task is to convey it to the right people. We hear talk of over-production, but what is meant is that Commerce has failed in its task of conveying what is produced to the men who need it. So in the spiritual world and in the commerce of ideas, that part of religion which can be stored in books and conveyed from thinker to hearer, Theology, as distinct from devotion, can be distributed.

The Church has her rich store of inheritance from the past, we have our thinkers and writers of big books in the present day ; the difficulty is to get it before the great masses of the people.

Moreover, men are interested in practical things. The approach to religion for them is from the side of conduct. They are more likely to listen and find if we begin with matters of Character. Not that we can stop there. Moralising that has no justification in theory or support in practice bores and offends them in the long run and is ineffective in itself. But it is probably better to begin with the Christian Character and work on to the Christian Creed.

The following work, I gather, is largely the outcome of open-air work in Christian Evidence. It is there that we find what puzzles people and what interests them. Their difficulties are often such as would never have occurred to us. Their ideas as to what Christianity is are not unfrequently such as seem to bear no resemblance to our Faith. From failure in distribution we and they are apart from one another.

At our Universities and in the studies of theologians the wealth is being produced to-day and has been stored up from the past. The problem is to make it available for the masses, and any attempt, such as is represented in this book, to do so must be welcomed.

CLEMENT F. ROGERS.

THE CHRISTIAN CHARACTER.

IS GOD REAL?

THE purpose of these Evidential Addresses is to set forth in homely language a number of reasons for holding the Christian Faith. I earnestly hope that they may help to dispel some doubts that may exist, and lead to a fuller acceptance of that Faith. I have decided to confine myself almost entirely to such evidence as is to be found in human history and personal experience. This policy has two advantages—it keeps us within the bounds of what is common knowledge to us all, and it supplies the surest ground on which to build belief. Our first subject is the Reality of God.

THE SEARCH FOR GOD.

When man ascended in the scale of being and became self-conscious and capable of reflection he was confronted by a big problem—the existence of the world. How and why came it into being? What actuated and determined its behaviour? Pondering upon such questions and finding no answer in the physical realm, man penetrated into another realm, the invisible world of spirit. He formed the conviction that the spirit world was infinitely more potent than the obvious world

around him, and he conceived it to be inhabited with irresistible beings who controlled the physical order, and were therefore to be feared, appeased, and worshipped. History testifies that through all the countless ages which separate us from the time when man became self-conscious, this conviction of the unseen world has been continuously with him. Whatever other persuasions have perished in course of his long sojourn on the earth this has persisted. It has also developed. We can trace its growth through the ages and see how it slowly and steadily assumed a more definite shape. We may indicate the direction and sum up the result of this great movement of human thought by noting that it has led to three basic convictions—(1) Belief in an unseen Power greater than this world. (2) Belief that that Power has the greatest good which the believer wants. (3) Belief that man by worship may have intercourse with the supreme Power. All religions of any account in the world to-day have these beliefs in common.

Now consider the tremendous significance of all this. The fact that man has penetrated beyond this tangible earth to a spirit-world, and has continued to be convinced all these thousands of years that that spirit-world is inhabited by a supreme Power is surely proof that there is, deep down in human nature, an instinct for Religion. The fact that man has this instinct is surely evidence that there must be satisfaction for it somewhere and somehow. It is too flagrant a violation of human reason and natural expectation that so demonstrable an instinct should be nothing but a delusion.

THE UNITY AND MORALITY OF GOD.

We find that successively in Arabia, Egypt, and Babylonia tribes and nations continued to search for a solution of the deep problems of life. In the process they invented an amazing variety of Deities to whom they attributed all the happenings on the earth that could not be accounted for by the most obvious physical conditions. But among all the nations enlisted in this great quest there stood out one that had a special genius for the task—the Hebrews. They were in the van of the movement, and, indeed, far ahead of all others. One distinctive mark of their advance was a conviction of the unity of God. To them the Being who ruled the universe and directed all physical forces was not a composite of various spirits that might fall out and create dissension; on the contrary, they contemplated one Master Mind, with a single will and a single purpose—a Being at unity within Himself. “Hear, O Israel, the Lord thy God is *one* Lord.” The other great truth grasped by the Hebrews was the righteousness of God. The Deities of other nations were still in the quagmire of moral confusion. The people themselves had no clear vision of a settled standard of rightness and equity, whilst their worship was often polluted with revolting obscenities. But the Hebrews made the grand discovery that God hated iniquity and loved righteousness. Yahveh kept His word and was in personal character irreproachable and perfectly holy. His will was moral, and upon His

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righteousness the Hebrews raised the structure of right social conduct.

Along this path, first explored and trodden by the Jews of old, we arrive at two conclusions which mark a tremendous advance in the human conception of God, namely, His unity and His morality. So there came a vision of God that was at once clearer and more exalted. It is in pursuing this path that men have found complete satisfaction.

THE FINAL VALUES.

The Dean of St. Paul's, in one of those illuminating and helpful talks that he gave last Lent in the Cathedral to young people, said that men find satisfaction in God because in Him they find the absolute values. What do we mean by an absolute value? The object, whatever it may be, has absolute value when it is infinitely precious for its own sheer sake. Nothing is taken into consideration in the final estimate except the thing itself. It stands wholly on its own merits. The value of a vast number of things with which we are daily concerned is not absolute but relative. For instance, money is appreciated almost solely because it is a highly convenient instrument to acquire things other than itself. Even cleverness falls into the same category. But there are things which require no sequence or any sort of following up to establish themselves as infinitely precious. What is their nature? They are things of the spirit, and consist of moral and spiritual qualities which at once arrest and hold our whole esteem and homage. These

make their own unique appeal ; they stir the best emotions and uplift the soul ; they bring to all who think on them joy and satisfaction. There is in them the secret of finality.

For evidence of the reality of these absolute values I appeal to your experience. Some there are perhaps—but they must be very few—who would assert that the most precious possession of man is his physical life ; many more will say “ No, there are things for which it is infinitely worth while to sacrifice material existence.” Let me give you an illustration of this contrast that came under my personal observation. In 1913 I took part in a public debate on Peace and War, and argued that international disputes ought to be settled, not by slaughter, but by an International Court of Justice. In the opposite camp a very intelligent young man mustered more arguments than I had imagined could exist to support the theme that war is inevitable and even desirable. When the Great War came the young man adroitly managed to keep outside its destructive zone and secured the maximum of personal safety and prosperity. That is one standard of value. Here is another : In the Battle of Loos the Captain of a company—who bid fair to be an outstanding figure in the life of the State—crawled out of his dug-out to help one of his men who was writhing in agony, and was killed in the act. I need not ask which of these two lines of conduct has in it the thrill and glory of true value. Our very instinct tells us that there are values which are not of this earth. They come from that Beyond which is also within us. We

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know them by experience. Millions of people give themselves in service and sacrifice and find their ample reward in the act itself. It has a real sovereign value of its own. And surely its very reality points to a Power above this earth, and is evidence of a God in whom absolute values consist.

Now, it is universally recognised among thinking people that there are three qualities of supreme value—Goodness, Truth, Beauty. Let us clearly understand what we mean by these great words. We get our idea of goodness through moral consciousness. There is something in us—it is surely a portion of the mind or the image of God—which tells us clearly that goodness has a value of its own. We recognise by an impulse of the instinct that there is inherent in goodness a certain sovereignty that makes it independent of all human whims. Whether you like it or dislike it, approve or disapprove, goodness is still goodness; it lives and prevails by its own innate merit. Nor does it depend upon being useful or profitable. If a man is honest because it pays, because it is the best policy, he is not a good man. Goodness is free of all earthly contingencies, a value serene and unshakeable in its own right. Whence comes it? We call the Deity GOD, signifying that He is supremely the Good One, the source and sum of all goodness. All the gleams of it that we see in human hearts—and we see them every day that we live—come from Him, and partake of the nature of His absolute attributes.

Another quality of real value in itself is *Truth*. I suspect from some things I have read and 'heard

that there are people who recognise no fixed standard of Truth. In these happily tolerant days such teachers become exceedingly vocal. The whole universe to them is in a shifting state and has nothing in it which is not liable to crash to the ground in splinters. They tell us that whatever a man believes is true for him so long as it happens to suit him. There is a superficial attractiveness about such representations which tends to make them popular. But believe me, it is the offer of a spurious freedom that can lead only to futility and confusion. There is a definite quality that we know as Truth, and by its own inherent worth it is of absolute value. Millions of men have desired it ; many have sought it at great cost, and have denied themselves mundane pleasures in order to gain more of it. Have all these students and toilers of the ages been chasing a phantom ? It is incredible. Truth is apprehensible and real ; it belongs to the eternal order of things and its value is absolute. It is a part of God. "He is the Rock, His word is perfect : for all His ways are judgment : a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is He."*

Beauty also is of intrinsic worth, and has value that is absolute. It may give pleasure, but is not dependent upon doing so. It is something to be loved for its own sake, irrespective of all effects. That is how Jesus loved it. He saw in mountains and valleys, in flowers and children a reflection of the beauty of Heaven, and rejoiced in it for that

*Deuteronomy xxxii. 4.

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reason. Beauty is infinite. We catch glimpses of it in nature and art, but we never feel that they exhaust it. The artist at his best not merely expresses himself, but reaches out and draws from a Beyond that is higher than he can actualise. The secret of this fact is that Beauty is one of the absolute attributes of the infinite God Himself. And secondly, we observe that beauty is dynamic, not passive and dormant, but vital and invigorating. It is an active principle of life, purifying and uplifting those who love it. The fact that it is and does these things is surely evidence that it has a place in the final and eternal values of God. These values—Goodness, Truth, Beauty, we know in part even now, and knowing them we love them more than all else. Not intellect, but love is the faculty by which we duly appreciate these supreme values. That is why the simplest farm-labourer can be as good and God-like as the most learned professor. Love is within the capacity of everyone, and it is the emotion or activity by which we embrace the highest when we see it. No one seriously doubts that these Godly qualities are the highest. Wherever they appear they command complete esteem and devotion. For them men have sacrificed, and will again sacrifice, all other possessions, even life itself.

REALITY.

Is not this convincing evidence of their reality? If they are real, then God, whose attributes they are, is real too. The Christian God is the supreme Being in whom these absolute values are enshrined.

He is the living sovereign Personality in whom they have their source and home. We have seen that it is within our power to know the reality of Goodness, Truth, and Beauty ; it is equally within our power to know the reality of God Himself. "He that loveth . . . knoweth God. He that loveth not, knoweth not God, for God is love."

Now, it is the natural result of knowing and loving God, that He becomes increasingly real to us. As we turn our hearts to Him so He becomes more and more to us a personal Friend. Without a shadow of irreverence we can feel familiar with God. We can speak mentally with Him as we walk along a lane or sit in solitude in a room. This personal communing is sheer joy—a bit of sunshine that disperses the mists of earth's perplexities.

O ! speak to Him, thou, for He hears,
And spirit with spirit can meet ;
Closer is He than breathing,
Nearer than hands and feet.

Make a practice of quietly concentrating your thoughts upon God two or three times a day, for however short a while, and you will learn how near and real He is. Let me say that in doing this, you do what is perfectly natural. We are so made and constituted that we cannot find satisfaction in things that are only physical. We must reach out and up to spiritual ideals, to the values that are absolute and eternal, for "Thou, O God, hast made us for Thyself, and we are restless until we rest in Thee."

WHAT IS THE GOSPEL ?

THE New Testament comprises a number of brief books written by ten or eleven different authors, but from cover to cover it is dominated by one supreme and central Figure—Jesus Christ. It is indeed amazing to reflect how much study has been lavished upon so small a compilation in the course of well-nigh two thousand years. In the last two or three generations especially, some of that study has come from critical readers, and we owe not a little to their scholarly contributions. It is, I believe, a fair representation of the result of all this studious service, to say that there is now general agreement upon two great questions. First, that Jesus of Nazareth was not a figment of men's imagination, but a real Person in history. Tacitus, a typical Roman gentleman and historian, writing about 115 A.D., records that "Christ, from whom the Christians took their name, had been put to death in the reign of Tiberius, by the procurator Pontius Pilate." Secondly, that the story of the life and character of Jesus as told in the four Gospels is in the main authentic and dependable. We know from the testimonies of Justin the Martyr and Irenæus that those accounts of Him were read

and expounded in the churches in the latter half of the second century.*

It is therefore not presumptuous or unhistorical to rely on the Gospels for information about the words and actions and the whole life-story of Jesus Christ. The closest scrutiny of all available evidence has brought nothing to light to shake the confidence of conscientious men in the general accuracy of the New Testament ; on the contrary, research has strengthened its claims of recent years. We may then pursue our course with the assurance that it rests on a firm and rational foundation.

GOD AND HUMANITY.

When we come to consider the words attributed to Jesus in the Gospels it seems to me impossible to avoid the conclusion that He claimed a union with God that was absolutely unique. "No man knoweth the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal Him." When the puzzled Philip, impatient of apparent vagueness and delay, cried out for a demonstration, "Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us"; Jesus saith unto him, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." It was in keeping with such expressions, which might

* See *Selection from Early Christian Writers* by H. M. Gwatkin (Macmillan), a most useful book, containing the original and translations, for those who like the present writer have neither the time nor the scholarship to study adequately the copious works of the early Fathers.

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easily be multiplied, that He took upon Himself the startling responsibility of forgiving sins. The scribes were staggered : " Who can forgive sins but God only ? " And Jesus answered, " But that ye may know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins (he saith to the sick of the palsy), I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed and go thy way into thine house." Observe also that Jesus claimed the stupendous authority to be the final Judge of all men. " Whosoever shall be ashamed of Me and of My words in this apostate and wicked generation, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels." It is incredible that overwhelming claims such as these should be made by a sane person except on the understanding that here is the very voice of God Himself. This is precisely what people came to believe. We catch occasional glimpses of this light in St. John the Baptist—" Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sins of the world " ; and in St. Peter—" Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." But not until after His Resurrection and Ascension, after time and opportunity for reflection upon His life and personality, above all, after actual experience of His spiritual presence and power within them, that there flamed up in His disciples the conviction that this was none other than the Son of God, and that in the Babe of Bethlehem, God had indeed mingled His nature with humanity. Men came to believe that as a fact in history, and gave it a central place in their permanent Creed. Nothing more profound or far-reaching was ever incorporated in

the Faith of a people. Think of it. That the All-sovereign Lord of the universe should deign to live and suffer and die as the humblest man on earth.

Can we believe it? I am appealing frequently in these Addresses to human instinct and experience. I submit that the coming of God in Jesus of Nazareth was the natural answer of God to the natural longing of man. We are made in such a way and possess such emotions that I cannot imagine us finding full satisfaction in a God who was infinitely remote—a sort of Sultan in the skies. People have tried that kind of religion—they called themselves Deists—but it never made much headway with humanity. We want a God who knows our nature and understands us. The same principle is at work in human relations. An illustration comes to my mind. In the Great War, when millions of his subjects were afflicted with anxiety, privations, and bereavement, our revered and solicitous King was indefatigable in his messages of sympathy. But it added enormously to the effect of those messages, that he himself insisted on sharing the privations, and that his own son, the Prince of Wales, was at the Front, sharing the common lot of the fighters. So it is in relation to God. It is easier for us to believe in Him, to love and to serve Him, because He has shared our nature, toils, and sorrows, and is on intimate terms with us. A severe critic has poured scorn on the homely conceptions of God that pervade Christian literature. He singles out Charles Wesley's hymn,

Jesu, Lover of my soul,
Let me to Thy bosom fly,

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and exclaims, "The Power which made the stars and the tiger, to be addressed by a pet name! Need I say more? Can I say less?" No, neither more nor less. We accept the challenge. It is one of the chief glories of the Christian Religion that there is in it this intimacy with God.*

Robert Browning expressed for all time a deep instinct of man, when he wrote—

'Tis the weakness in strength that I cry for! my
flesh, that I seek
In the Godhead! I seek and I find it. O Saul, it
shall be
A Face like my face that receives thee; a man like
to me,
Thou shalt love and be loved by, for ever: a Hand
like this hand
Shall throw open the gates of new life to thee! See
the Christ stand!

The kernel of the Gospel is the Incarnation of God.

THE LOVE OF GOD.

Now, it is entirely in keeping with this fact that Jesus in the course of His life and ministry on earth should have impressed upon men that God is love. The Hebrews for centuries had believed in the sovereignty and goodness of God, that He ruled the world in righteousness and took a special interest in themselves. But love is much more than that; it is a bond of fellowship, a readiness to go out in self-giving for its object, like the mother for the child, and the patriot for his country. The He-

*See *The Gospel and Human Needs*, by J. N. Figgis, 86-91 (Longman's).

brews had not arrived at that conception of God. It was Jesus who brought it to light. Mark His teaching. God, He said, is like a shepherd who toils along the hills and climbs the rocks to seek and save his wayward sheep. God, He said again, is like that loyal father who longs to forgive and welcome his penitent son. Mark, too, the conduct of Jesus. Day by day, in acts of kindness to the poor and the sick and the suffering, He showed forth the love of God. He taught and did these things in the teeth of misunderstanding and hostility on the part of the leaders of the Jews, and when the supreme test came, rather than betray His conception of God and fall short of revealing to us men the mind and nature of His Father, He laid down His life on the Cross. Well might St. John say, "In this was the love of God made manifest." The Gospel is the good news that God is love.

THE BROTHERHOOD OF MAN.

Jesus was frankly a Jew, who loved His nation and esteemed many of its traditions. But His patriotism was not blind and cramped like that of most Jews. They in general saw almost all virtues in themselves and very few elsewhere. The more enlightened Greeks were in this respect no better, as may be inferred from the fact that in their common speech the same word served for foreigner as for barbarian. The Romans showed no improvement upon this narrowness of outlook and national prejudice; they employed the same word for foreigner as for enemy. No one has laid to the

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charge of Jesus a share in that sort of pettiness. Although he found Himself in a world riven by narrow nationalism, He remained utterly untainted by it. A Roman centurion, a Woman of Samaria, an orthodox Jew—all receive the same respect and fair dealing at His hands. He brought into the world an entirely new spirit, and that sprang from the truth that humanity is fundamentally one.

Now, let us ask, Is there anything within our observation in the condition of the world to-day, that may reasonably be adduced as evidence in support of this idea? It is obvious that nations are becoming increasingly inter-dependent. The very clothes we wear and the food we eat come in part from far-away lands and are gathered and packed by dusky hands. Economic conditions are so intertwined that highly organised nations advance or retreat together in the realm of money. All this results in international consultations on a scale unparalleled in the history of the world. Surely this is some testimony to the validity of the view first revealed by Jesus Christ—that the human race is essentially one vast brotherhood. It is becoming increasingly clear that either this view of mankind must prevail in the shaping of international politics, or the world as we know it will be ruined by wars. A glance at the succession of wars in Europe in modern times will convince anyone of that. After Rossbach, Jena; after Jena, Sedan; after Sedan, the Marne; after the Marne——? Is this appalling entail never to be broken? It must. But how? There is only one impulse sufficiently potent for the task, and that is a new

conception engendering a new spirit. Behind foreign policies and diplomatic negotiations, behind the many movements of the League of Nations, there must be whole-hearted acceptance of the good news of Jesus Christ that mankind is really one, and that the true destiny of the nations is to work together for the welfare of the whole world.

THE RESURRECTION.

Even in a brief and practical Address we cannot omit the Resurrection in answer to the question, What is the Gospel? The evidence in the four Gospels that Jesus rose from the tomb on the third day is, I am persuaded, convincing. But it is by no means the only evidence. The Gospels were not written and circulated for some time after Jesus had returned to His Father. It is also to be noted that they were not written primarily to prove the Resurrection, but rather to give an account of His life and teaching to those who already believed that He had risen and ascended. A steadily increasing number of people were convinced that Jesus was with them in spirit after His departure in the flesh. They felt His power, and it was this personal experience that persuaded thousands that He was still alive and in communion with them. St. Paul is an example. "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." The same evidence persists and prevails to-day, and the evidence of history and experience deserves to carry weight. That is why in these Addresses I appeal to it so constantly. There are millions of people to-day who cannot imagine that the tomb was the end of Jesus because

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they have personal intercourse with Him. Those who make room for Him in their hearts, who drive away the evil spirits of pride and selfishness, hatred and lust, and welcome Him instead, do find that He really lives and satisfies here and now.

But mark that the Resurrection of Jesus Christ is not regarded in the Christian Faith as an unrelated miracle. It sheds its light upon the whole human race. Just as He died in a representative capacity, so also He rose in a representative capacity. He said, not merely, "I have risen," but, "I am the Resurrection and the Life." His is the Resurrection of all men. Again I appeal to experience for confirmation. Have we not here what alone can satisfy one of our deepest yearnings? Are you content to think that your father or mother, or any vivid personality has ended in dust? It is true that glimpses of immortality were caught before the Gospel was known, but the Resurrection of Jesus Christ defined and guaranteed immortality to an extent that was hitherto unheard of. What we Christians contemplate beyond the frontiers of this life is not merely a vague communal survival, or the dim permanence of a disembodied spirit; we contemplate every living personality going forward in all his fulness—body and soul—right through the door of death, and we see him quickened and enhanced on the farther shore. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ assures us of that destiny. So from the beginning to the end of life He brings us good news; and unlike some good news, it is confirmed by history and experience, and verified by our very instincts.

DOES CHRISTIANITY WORK ? *

When Jesus ascended to His Father in Heaven He left on this earth a little group of people who were imbued with His teaching and example, and He counted on them to witness to Himself and to all that He had brought into the world. In that group we see the body of the Christian Church. The life of the body was the spirit of Jesus Christ. We are therefore not far wrong in describing Christianity as the presence and power of the ascended Lord in human history. It is a movement that has persisted and spread for nearly two thousand years, and upon every age it has left its own unique impression. We are going now to consider what distinctive contributions it has made to the history of the world. And I want at once to admit that those contributions are sometimes disappointing. They are neither as thorough nor as great as they ought to be. The spirit is equal to much more, but the body has been defective. Christianity as expressed in its organised societies has often failed, but that is solely because they have lacked the vision and the power of Christ. It is not He, it is we who have stumbled and fallen from time to time. And yet the record is not one without a vast amount that is creditable, impressive, and even inspiring.

* I am much indebted in this address to Canon Mozley's book, *The Achievements of Christianity*. (S.P.C.K.).

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Considering the blunt and earthen instruments with which Christianity has had to work, the wonder is not its failures but its achievements. We shall see that it has in fact immeasurably advanced the true progress of human life.

THE EARLY CHRISTIANS.

Let us begin with inquiring what did Christianity achieve in and for the first converts. Did anything distinguish them from non-Christians, and if so, What? There was in those days a definite search for happiness. It was sought in the philosophy known as "stoicism," also in "mystery-religions" and other cults; but the records of the time do not reveal that any great measure of it was found and experienced. There remained a vast amount of restlessness and dissatisfaction. The new religion of Christ cannot be said to have given happiness a prominent place. It never dangled it before the eyes of men as a prize to be clutched; on the contrary it frankly anticipated for its adherents antagonism, afflictions, and persecution. And there was a fulfilment of these forebodings, especially under Nero and Domitian. But so sure were those early Christians of the Presence and Power of the risen Lord, and so utterly persuaded were they of the truth and rightness of their Cause, that they found light and joy therein, and did indeed attain real and unquenchable happiness. The experience of St. Stephen, whose serenity in trial and torture was seen to shine "as it had been the face of an angel" was repeated in thousands in the succeeding gene-

rations. Alike in scorching flames and foul arena there glowed in these sufferers and martyrs a satisfaction that could only have been derived from the possession of Reality. Here was something new on this old earth. It was an experience so little known that new words had to be coined to express the joyousness of heart and peace of mind that the Christians felt and exhibited.

Other distinctive features of character were soon revealed by these early followers of Christ, *e.g.*, love for their fellow men. I am not suggesting that nothing was known of love before Christianity; there were gleams of it here and there in the ancient world, but now for the first time it became an enthusiasm and a principle of life. Christians had a passion for the welfare of their fellow men, and toiled and sacrificed themselves to promote the good of others. Indeed, nothing seems to have impressed the pagan world more profoundly than this deep concern for the well-being of humanity at large.

The Christians had also a new code of morality, derived, of course, from the conduct and discourses of their Master. It is universally admitted that their standard of morality was on a much higher plane than that of Jews or pagans. They were more thorough in the practice of honesty and purity than any other society of people, and they definitely opposed certain evil customs that were indulged in the Roman community. In fact, it was mainly on account of their refusal to conform to certain crooked practices and cruel actions that obtained in normal society, and for their loyalty

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to the higher code of Christ, that they were hated and persecuted.*

History shows that the chief concern of Christians for the first three hundred years of our era was to apply the teaching and example of Jesus Christ to their own lives and character. Their religion therefore was mainly of a personal type, and exercised no great influence upon political and national movements. Not seldom it was persecuted, and almost continuously it was humiliated and treated with contempt. Its opportunities for service on the grand scale were exceedingly scant. Yet, even in this obscurity Christian principles did penetrate some way into the public life of the Roman Empire. Under Constantine the conditions of slaves were ameliorated; revolting displays of gladiators were suspended, and the judicial courts strengthened the bond of marriage and the position of women. Looking back upon the Christianity of those early centuries we can meet the critics with a record which testifies indisputably that it inspired the highest qualities and produced the noblest kind of character. Even from the humble beginning of its great career Christianity is seen to be a religion that works.

THE MIDDLE AGES.

The next great phase in Europe was the crash of the Roman Empire. Barbarian Goths, Vandals, Franks, Huns, Lombards and Mohammedans—some simultaneously, others in rapid succession—

* See *The Church in the Roman Empire* (pp. 236-237), by W. M. Ramsay. (Hodder & Stoughton.)

invaded these lands, and pressed onward with indescribable cruelties and devastating effects. We are coming to the Dark Ages. But in all that welter of blood and iron the Church stood firm for its truths and principles. The mere fact that Christianity was not exterminated in the sixth, seventh, and eighth centuries is an amazing testimony to the fortitude of Christian people and to the truth and validity of their religion. Christianity not only survived this onslaught ; it became the most potent force in moulding the thoughts and actions of the new nations.

Celtic and Roman missionaries taught the Saxons, Teutons, and similar settlers, with the happy result that the Christian Faith exercised a formative influence upon them, and upon the constitutions which were then in the making. G. K. Chesterton, with characteristic insight, has remarked, " Across the Dark Ages, Christianity was the one path that was not dark."

Passing to the later Middle Ages, roughly from the ninth to the sixteenth centuries, we observe that the Christian Church played a great and public part in erecting the laws and customs of various states. The part was not always creditable. There are black spots upon the record—unchristian use of force and the perpetration of cruelties, such as the Inquisition in Spain and imitations of it in other lands. Christian leaders in those days regarded their inherited view of Christian truths as the foundation of life and civilisation. When they saw any departure from the Faith, they saw danger to the whole order of society, and consequently

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slaughtered heretics with little compunction. It was a point of view which no intelligent Christian would desire to defend, and it remains a blot upon the record of the Christian Church.

But in common fairness we must recognise that there were other activities of the Church in those days which are infinitely to its credit. Humanity was immeasurably enriched by the zeal of Christian people for art. Craftsmanship in Churches and Cathedrals, strong and stately music, healthy and sonorous poetry like Chaucer's in England and Tudur Aled's in Wales, uplifted and ennobled men's thoughts and character. It is due to the Christian faith to recognise that all this wealth of art was in closest touch with it, and was in fact inspired by it. There is a difference in this respect between the art of the Middle Ages and Greek Art. We are informed by competent observers that the latter derived nothing from Greek religion, but helped rather to purify it. Art in Christian countries has drawn its inspiration largely from Christian truths, and never more so than in the Middle Ages. It is not too much to say that its dominant motive was to give the illumination of sight and sound to the glory of the Christian Faith.

We note, too, that in this great formative period, it was the Church that raised the standard of learning and piety. The founding of universities in Europe, and such provision as was made for the education of the young, were due almost entirely to the munificence and activities of Christian people. The honoured name of William of Wykeham does not stand alone. In the monasteries, which arose

in amazing numbers, learning and piety were fostered and thousands of people lived in poverty and self-discipline, contemplating God and cultivating the higher virtues. It was an age of saints, like Francis of Assisi, purged from the dross of materialism and exhibiting the highest moral and spiritual qualities.

I am well aware that there are many who will remind me that monastic life had another side. That is true. There were many instances of the abuse of wealth and of self-indulgence in course of the centuries ; but they were exceptions, not the rule. What concerns us here and now is the historical fact that Christianity in mediæval times did hold up to men a higher ideal of life and character than the world itself could visualise, and did actually inspire in millions of people a conviction of the Truth and a life of goodness in which they found the joy and satisfaction of final Reality.

CHRISTIANITY AND SOCIAL SERVICE.

We must move on to glance at the record of what the Christian Religion has done for humanity in the way of social service. In its organised form it has done less than men have a right to expect. Its Founder was constantly attending to the poor and oppressed and suffering. The Church has sometimes sided with the strong against the weak. But not often, and certainly not mainly. We must beware of judging by such a spurious criterion as its relationship with any particular theory of economics or with any party in politics. When one gets down to facts of actual service the record is impressive

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and creditable. It is universally admitted that it was Christianity which first inspired on any considerable scale the desire to improve the position of women, protect children, relieve the poor, promote philanthropic institutions like hospitals and orphanages, and inculcate chivalry in games and war. Mr Lecky, an impartial authority on this subject, says that the record of Christianity in the realm of philanthropy "has never been paralleled or approached in the pagan world." * History shows that it has been by far the greatest factor in promoting movements that have benefited those least able to help themselves.

But let us come to comparatively modern times. In the movement to abolish the slave-trade about one hundred years ago Wilberforce and Clarkson publicly declared that they derived their inspiration from the New Testament. In promoting the Factory Acts Lord Shaftesbury said that he was moved to play this part by the love of Christ for the poor and oppressed. Christian men like Frederick Denison Maurice and Charles Kingsley were in the van of the movement for ameliorating social conditions in the Industrial Revolution. † Nor ought we to forget the service of Christianity—and especially of the Church of England—in the sphere of education. I recall that when speaking from a rostrum one day in a market-square someone shouted at me, "What has the Church ever done for the working man?"

* *History of European Morals*. Vol. II., p. 100. (Longmans.)

† *History of England*, by G. M. Trevelyan, pp. 638, 678. (Longmans.)

By the mercy of Providence I remembered that until fifty or sixty years ago nearly all the education that the working man's children received was provided by the Church, and that a good deal is still so provided. We can and do claim that in modern times, as in the earlier days of Christianity, the Church on the whole has rendered incalculable service to those most in need. Who, on the other hand, was the fiercest opponent of such service in the last century? Who lavished his genius upon entrenching the powerful and crushing the weak—an avowed apostle of force preaching that might is right? It was the atheist, Nietzsche. I know that we have fallen short, and have not shown sufficiently the power and glory of our religion as an ameliorating influence in the world, but Christianity has not failed so utterly as to leave God without witness to His will for the well-being of mankind.

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This brings me to the absorbing subject of the Christian character.* When Jesus Christ is allowed free course in the mind and motive of a man; when He is the decisive influence in moulding conduct and character He purifies and uplifts and sanctifies the whole personality. Even an agnostic has said that no man can do better than try so to direct himself that Christ would approve of him. The world to-day—more than ever, I think—is yearning for the highest, and it interprets increasingly as the highest those moral and spiritual qualities which

* It is admirably treated in *Some Principles of Moral Theology*, by K. E. Kirk. (Longmans.)

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are seen in Christ. When men see these proportionately in His followers they will be more and more disposed to believe in the Truth that inspires them. Nothing witnesses so effectively to the Christian faith as the consecrated characters of those who are moulded by it. A saint whose integrity and humility are beyond question is more persuasive to modern men than volumes of intellectual apologetics. And the fact that this is so is an indication of the general desire for reality. We are not left without witness to the power of Christianity to reform and beautify the lives of men in our own day. Professor D. S. Cairns in his persuasive book, *The Reasonableness of the Christian Faith*, tells the story of a man who was a drunkard for many years. He was in prison one night, when Christ came to him in his cell. The next morning he declared to the Professor who was befriending him, "I cam' oot o' twa prisons," and he ever afterwards lived a perfectly sober life.. As one whose privilege it is to take a small share in mission work I can testify that such instances of the saving power of Christ are by no means rare. Indeed, we are all daily in contact with people who although they display no placard to advertise the fact are yet conscious that it is by the grace of God that they live a life that is pure and plucky, honest and serviceable. Does Christianity work? Yes; and its practical influence in the formation of character is the strongest testimony to its truth and reality.

I.

WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN ?

"The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch."—

Acts xi. 26.

THIS was evidently regarded as a landmark in the history of those early disciples. How did it come about ? There were in Antioch a great number of people who had recently avowed belief in Jesus Christ. When this fact became known to the Apostles—who had remained in Jerusalem as a Headquarters Staff to direct the activities of the growing Church—they sent Barnabas to shepherd and teach and baptize the new converts. The work was so onerous that he went to Tarsus and insisted on Saul returning with him to Antioch to help him. For a whole year these disciples assembled at frequent intervals, and had apparently a Church of their own. They realised their fellowship in Christ despite the fact that there were Jews and Greeks among them. Besides fellowship, these gatherings served two other purposes: the worship of God in prayer and praise, and the teaching of much people. What did the disciples teach ? It is clear that their watchword was Christ. An eye-witness has declared that they preached and expounded Christ and the Resurrection. These early converts were doubtless first impressed with the beautiful life and character of Jesus, and then had passed on to accept Him as the Christ, the fulfilment of Israel's prophecies, and the Saviour of the world from its sinful and disastrous state. That was the

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faith that held them together and inspired them to worship and teach men in Antioch. So well organised and active were they, and so different were they in spirit and practice from the rest of the community, that even the frivolous people of this gay city were constrained to take notice of them. They counted for something and made their influence felt even in that strange atmosphere, and since they could no longer be ignored, the Antiochians, half in jest, half in earnest, called them "Christians." What is a Christian?

KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS.

Even this mere glance at the story of those early disciples suggests that the first necessity is knowledge and appreciation of Jesus Christ. I would urge every would-be Christian to make himself familiar with the Gospels, and if possible to supplement that authoritative story by reading a modern study of Jesus like that by Paterson Smyth in *A People's Life of Christ* or Douglas Edwards's *The Shining Mystery of Jesus*. We must become acquainted with Jesus. It is significant that it was for a catechumen named Theophilus that St. Luke first wrote his Gospel. Very many, especially young people, are to-day in search of a philosophy of life. I would urge them to read the great utterances of Jesus, and dye their minds deep in those statements which reveal His faith in God, His love of men, His standard of values, and His hope for the future. Some people will be disposed to dismiss such teaching as unpractical, but most will not, for wherever else we have lost ground there is

abroad much idealism to-day—an aspiration and spiritual hunger more general than has been known for generations. When we hear Him bid us love all men, give alms in secret, judge others generously, trust God to the uttermost ; or when we listen to His teaching on the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man we feel instinctively that here are truths and principles that win the human heart by their inherent moral and spiritual splendour.

We learn, too, that the practical life of Jesus was in perfect consonance with His verbal teaching. Here He takes that unique position to which we must refer in a moment. Other prophets and sages, Jewish, Christian, and Pagan, have enunciated lofty principles, but so far as I know no one else in history has presented himself as the faultless exponent of all he has advocated. “Do as I say,” is the message of the best of human philosophers. Jesus alone claims and justifies the claim, to say, “Do as I do,” “Follow Me.” If you think of His activities and behaviour you will see that without exception they fulfil all that He taught. He pitied the poor and downcast, healed the sick, forgave His enemies, sought the wayward, brought joy and happiness to those in distress, and finally surrendered Himself to death rather than betray His trust. His conduct as well as His teaching never fails to evoke the profoundest appreciation.

THE CHRIST OF GOD.

We are thus prepared for a further truth. It is beyond all doubt that Jesus claimed to be in a unique sense the Son of God—sharing fully the God-

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head of His Father. How else can we interpret such utterances as the following :—"Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." "No one knoweth the Son save the Father, neither doth any know the Father save the Son." He dared to represent Himself as superior in moral authority to the Law of Moses: "Ye have heard it said by them of old time . . . but I say unto you . . ." He even declared Himself to be the final Judge of men. All this is surely unthinkable apart from the claim that He was more than the best of men. So we pass from admiration of His conduct to adoration of His Personality. "My Lord and my God!" The difference was dramatically stated by Charles Lamb when discussing theology at the fireside with a few friends. He said, "If Shakespeare now entered this room we should immediately rise on our feet; if Jesus came, we should instinctively fall on our knees." We have reached finality. It is the Incarnation, this coming of God Himself in Jesus of Nazareth, that necessitates the Christian religion being, not *a* religion, but the final and universal religion. In the light of Christ's Divinity the Christian knows what God is like, and knows too that his religion is destined for the whole world.*

A MEMBER OF CHRIST.

When Jesus returned to Heaven He left on this earth a legacy—the fellowship of the few simple

* See *The Universality of Christ*, by William Temple. (S.C.M.)

folk who had shared His sorrows and triumphs. Upon this company He dared to place the burden of carrying on His work in the world, always with the promise of ready and sufficient help. So the Kingdom of God—the great spiritual reality which Jesus came to establish, the essence of which is His own spirit, which knows neither time nor space, this Kingdom was given a tangible aspect, a sacrament, for the convenience and help of the material world. Here is a human institution to hold the spiritual treasure and to share it among men. Jesus meant His followers in successive ages to enter this fellowship. “Go ye therefore and make disciples of all the nations . . . baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” Baptism is the Divinely authorised doorway into the Kingdom. Those of us who have entered therein have frankly avowed ourselves to be in the fellowship of His Body, which is the Church. To the Church, then, we have a duty—the duty of loyalty to its continuous life and teaching. The understanding Christian is neither isolated nor self-centred. He owes it to live in fellowship and co-operation with those who share his faith. The Church of the first century has set an example in that respect for all generations to follow. We have to recognise on the one hand that Christianity involves Churchmanship, and on the other that Churchmanship is no substitute for Christianity.

This reflection brings us to consider a yet more direct and personal loyalty. In Baptism we are each made a member of Christ, and are therefore united to Him as a branch is united to the vine

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or a limb to the body. The mere glimpse we have caught of the truths and principles which He enunciated is enough to convince us that His teaching and example set a standard very different from that which finds favour in materialistic circles. He brought into human life a new sense of values, setting store by qualities which the worldling often despises, and showing contempt for things that the worldling often worships. That is why He is rightly regarded as revolutionary. Reflect now that Churchmanship means being a member of Christ. Do you accept His standard in preference to mere mundane considerations and social conventions? Do you love what He loves, hate what He hates, and estimate values as He estimates them? Are you obviously indented with Him as those early Christians were identified with Him in Antioch and were therefore called Christians? That is the challenge that emerges from the implication of Holy Baptism. If we are not already in the fellowship of Christ's Body, God put it into our hearts and give us courage to enter it! If already we are members of Christ, God give us grace to be loyal to our vows! It is men and women of Christian character, who know the mind of Christ and manifest His spirit, that the world is in dire need of. Only as they are forthcoming will the wrongs that afflict us be removed. The Christian movement is the best and most beneficent in the kingdom of men, and you will never do anything so good and helpful as try to be a Christian.

II.

LOVE GOD.

"We love Him because He first loved us."

—I John iv. 19.

THE love of God was St. John's favourite theme in all his writings, and upon it he based his appeal for the cultivation of a loving disposition and the practice of morality among men. The gist of his teaching in this connection may be summed up thus:—"Begin with believing that God is love, and out of that conviction will come the fruit of a fair and honourable life." Now, there are some who imagine that this association of religion and morality is wholly fictitious. They suppose that we can attain the highest standard of conduct and character without burdening ourselves with any religious belief. But their view is less acceptable to-day than it has been for a long while, because the science of psychology—the study of the mentality and habit of man—has brought to clearer light the truth as stated by St. John. It is now scientifically demonstrated that human behaviour is neither self-contained nor spontaneous. There is always a history behind it, a chain of antecedents leading inexorably to its final and outward form. Conduct is the outcome of a process of thoughts—conscious or unconscious—and bears the impress of the quality of these thoughts. Psychology definitely confirms the general principle assumed by St. John when he associates moral conduct with love for God.

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“ HE FIRST LOVED US.”

St. John says God is love. In practical terms this means that love is the motive force behind the Creation and all the ways of Providence. I hasten to admit that there are many facts within human observation that suggest the contrary, or at least give occasion to doubt ; but I console myself that you are much too reasonable to expect me in a few sentences to solve the problems that occur to you in this connection. There is a little book called *The Riddle of Life*, by Bishop Nevile Talbot which grapples with them in a frank and illuminating way, and I would heartily commend it to those who seek further guidance than it is possible for me to give at the moment. One word of practical counsel I would contribute as a preliminary—Train yourself mentally to look upon life as a whole. Do not dwell on its darker side to the exclusion of all the bright gleams that shed a lustre upon it. The first emergence of God as Creator of the world is redolent with beauty and joy. “ And God saw everything that He had made, and behold it was very good.” The trees of Eden were designed not less for beauty than for use—“ every tree that is pleasant to the sight ” ; and man was made to enjoy the whole wealth of Nature and to be happy in the companionship of his Maker. Sin is so obviously, although often indirectly, allied with misery, that we can believe, without violence to our conscience, that before its intrusion there was no shadow upon the face of man. And despite its extent and ravages to-day there is so much good and so much beauty

in the world that our faith in the love of Him who brought it into being and directs its evolution may well remain unshaken and steadfast.

But in addition to these general considerations we have each of us his or her own history and experience. A cross has been laid upon us here and there on the pilgrimage; but count your blessings too. There is a credit as well as a debit side in every life. A debased threepenny-bit detracts nothing from the value of the other good coins in your pocket. In his wholesome and vigorous book, *The Art of Thinking*, Ernest Dimnet remarks: "It is one of the humiliating features of human nature that we resent a few little things which happen to irritate us more than we appreciate a great deal for which we ought to be grateful." There is probably not one of us who, looking back upon his or her life might not feel that the balance is on the right side, that there is more to rejoice in and thank for than to regret and lament.

But the surest demonstration that God first loved us is the story of the Incarnation—that God Himself came amongst us in the person of His son Jesus Christ, and thus identified Himself with us in all our weakness and sorrows. If a rich man left his mansion and his affluence and went to live in a slum among frail and broken fragments of humanity—and such gracious acts are not unknown—you would not doubt the love of that man. It is but the faintest reflection of what God has done for us. And when He came He was misunderstood and rejected. "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not." The most powerful people in

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Church and State were ranged against Him. He was persecuted and finally put to death. To all this humiliation and suffering Jesus submitted and surrendered Himself in sheer fidelity to His mission to reveal in all its fullness the character of God as infinite love. "God commendeth His love in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." We whose boundless privilege it has been to be the objects of so great a sacrifice may well join in the simple and pregnant statement of St. John—"He first loved us."

"WE LOVE HIM."

In human relationship we are invariably drawn to those who love us. It was this fact of the magnetism of love that Jesus had in mind when He said with reference to the climax of His self-sacrifice, "I, if I be lifted up will draw all men unto Me." Once we are really convinced that God loves us we shall be moved by some irresistible momentum to love and serve Him in return.

But let us consider what we mean by loving God. Bishop Gore in a recent sermon of great power remarked that there are two Greek words translated love. One is *eros*, which has reference to the feelings and emotions, and indicates a spontaneous affection which seizes one without premeditation; the other is *agape*, and signifies a fixed determination of the will in a certain direction. Here is something that we ourselves consciously set in motion, something that involves our own will and choice. This is the word that comes so often in the New Testament.

When an appeal is made to us to love God, we are asked to enthrone Him deliberately in our hearts as the best and highest possession, to set Him above all things and all men, to make Him the master passion of our souls. In Bernard Shaw's play, *Joan of Arc* is told that what she loves is religion, not God. It was not true of her, but I sometimes suspect that it may be true of some of us. We need to make sure from time to time that the affection of our hearts passes beyond institutions and observances to the living personal God Himself.

Think now of the moral implications of this love for God. We conceive of Him as the only One who fully embraces in Himself the great spiritual qualities of Goodness, Truth, and Beauty. Love for God, translated into practical terms, means that you choose these qualities as the most precious prizes in human life. Setting upon them a value which far exceeds every other desire or possession you will deliberately direct your mind and heart to their attainment. George Tyrell once said, "To love God supremely and alone means to care for nothing but that in all our life and action the Divine life and action shall find the fullest possible expression." The dominant passion of your life as a lover of God will be the cultivation of those things which are inherent in His nature. You will deny yourself the many alluring offers that are in any sort of conflict with them, and cleave to the highest. God—all that He is and represents in the realm of values—will come first. So we arrive at this: that love for God is the basis of the Christian Character and the inspiration of the best and noblest conduct.

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Mary Webb had grasped this secret when in her sublime story *Armour Wherein He Trusted*, she made the half-withered saintly monk say to the suppliant knight, "Well, son, if you are come to the stair 'I love thee,' you be not far from the topmost rung of the ladder. For this 'I love thee' is like the rolling ruddy sun that drags in his wake clouds of all colours."

Christianity is much more concerned with this motive in general than it is with actions in detail. That is why St. Augustine dared to say, "Love God and do what you like." "To love rightly," said a wonderful woman of the nineteenth century, Geraldine Jewsbury, "is the highest morality of which mankind is capable." The process of behaviour is moulded by what we love. "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." And where your heart is will determine your conduct. Therefore is there no such far-reaching and comprehensive a commandment as this—"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and soul and mind and strength." Your character—what you are in spirit and disposition—is woven from the fibre of your affections. It follows with irresistible logic that the most urgent necessity for everyone of us who would be Christians in reality as well as in name is to train our affections in such a way that we shall love the highest as it is found in Jesus Christ and find our greatest joy in following His example.

III.

LOVE ONE ANOTHER.

"If God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."
—I John iv. 11.

BELIEF that God is love will inspire men, not only to love Him in return, but also to love one another.

THE UNIVERSAL BROTHERHOOD.

We are clearly taught in the New Testament by the words of Jesus and of His disciples that God is the Father of all men. That means that men of every colour and clime exist by His will and depend upon His providence. It means, too, that He desires the well-being and happiness of all men. Any other attitude on the part of God as our Father is inconceivable. Whatever differences there may be between us intellectually, politically, and racially ; however varied our speech and civilisation, we all have this in common—we are children of the same Divine Father and objects of the same loving care. The most permanent and fundamental things in life are shared by us, and this fact makes of us a great brotherhood. In the Christian view, therefore, the idea that the whole human race is a brotherhood is not just a matter of sentiment, but of religious truth, something which of necessity follows from the Fatherhood of God and rests securely upon that firm foundation.

It belongs to the very nature of this brotherhood

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that it does not destroy diversity of type. Variety of nationality and racial genius may continue unhampered and even enhanced, for truth is greater than that which any one type contains. Beneath all differences, where hearts have hold of the Fatherhood of God, is a sense of family union. My understanding of the New Testament is that its teaching leads to a fellowship of nations, not to the obliteration of national traits. As it takes two men to make one brother, so it takes many nations to make a universal brotherhood. It is a conspicuous feature of the triumph of Christ that He makes both Jew and Gentile one, without inflicting expatriation upon either. The Church is not an anti-national, but a super-national fellowship, promoting, not a colourless cosmopolitanism, but a real internationalism. Christian love harmonises every variety that is morally good into a blend wherein each has freedom to realise itself and all have unity. The nation that believes in the universal Fatherhood of God will want to know about and interest itself in all other nations ; it will seek and serve their well-being ; it will hasten to extend to them its most precious possession—the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We have here a faith that builds a bridge over many a gulf. St. Paul, in his enthusiasm for the universality and supremacy of Christ exclaimed, “ There is neither Greek nor Jew, male nor female ; Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free, but all things and in all—Christ.”

There is to-day a great pining among all civilized peoples for this sense of fraternity. Everywhere men are awakening to the fact that it is the essential

condition and precursor of peace. We all want peace, but we cannot have it until we have learnt the mind of Christ, and realised that under the Fatherhood of God we all are brethren. That is why as disciples of Jesus Christ we have a special responsibility in the problem of world peace. It is we who ought to be in the van of the movement, whether we judge the matter from the point of view of our individual duty or from that of attaining the distant goal. By prayer in our hearts and by work for the League of Nations, let us promote with all our power that spirit of brotherhood which is inherent in the Christian faith and which alone can bring about what the world is longing for—the blessing of peace.

THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

Within the all-inclusive brotherhood of the human race there is the more intimate brotherhood of the Christian Church. By the Christian Church we mean here all who have knowledge of God, and love and worship Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. The wider circle of mankind contains millions who know nothing of the principle of brotherhood inherent in its very constitution. Within the more restricted brotherhood of the Christian Church, every baptized member is rightly expected to recognise the special bond that unites him to his fellow-believers. The fellowship here is conscious of itself. We are one by reason of those deep and far-reaching convictions that we hold in common. And yet, alas ! this very fellowship shows far too few signs

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of unity. We see it broken into fragments that suggest divisions and gulfs of separation. It is not so bad as it seems. There is much more fellowship of spirit than any one would surmise from glancing at various types of Christians wending their way to their several sanctuaries on a Sunday. But the fact remains that we are a long way from attaining that outward unity that ought to be the symbol and expression of our love for one another.

I am not here concerned with schemes and policies for the reunion of the Body of Christ. They are not immediately relevant, for our concern is with the inward character of the individual Christian. But even from this point of view there are certain things which need to be said with regard to our attitude to those fellow-Christians from whom we are separated. We ought not to accept our divisions as inevitable or justifiable, for there has never been schism without sin, and in that sin history shows that every denomination in England has had some share. Therefore these divisions are to be deplored by us, and the sight of them should stir in us a sense of shame. As a counter-blast to their existence and the reproach they bring upon our common faith we should welcome and use every opportunity that comes our way to show affection for those who differ from us, and to promote co-operation in those innumerable spheres where we can do so without compromising our principles or violating our conscience. At the present time especially it is our duty to study the problem of reunion and to keep steadfastly before us the vision of a reunited Church. Greater efforts are now made than has been known

for generations to heal the wounds that divisions inflict upon the Body of Christ, and every Christian who understands his religion must wish to take his share in the process and make a contribution, however small and humble, to the desired end.

THE CONGREGATION.

Let us now come still nearer home. It can be no secret that in many a congregation there is a lamentable lack of the Christian spirit of mutual love. We have heard and known of petty jealousies, suspicions, misrepresentations, and aloofness. These things ought not to be. They are wrong in themselves, and they hinder God's work. You remember how in the service of Holy Communion the congregation is solemnly addressed, "Ye that do truly and earnestly repent you of your sins, and are in love and charity with your neighbours." It is the sacrament of unity. Will you see to it in your conscience that you desire nothing but the welfare and happiness of your fellow-churchmen, and that in the spirit of Christian charity you do all in your power to promote that good purpose?

There is no greater responsibility resting upon us than to love one another, for of all virtues Jesus singled it out as the one that would most distinguish His followers. "A new commandment I give unto you that ye love one another; even as I have loved you that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another." So well did the early disciples live out that commandment and incorporate its

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spirit in their conduct and character that the pagans exclaimed in amazement, "See how these Christians love one another." It is a tragedy of the first magnitude that those same words should be flung at us to-day in sheer irony and cynicism.

There is a touching story that St. John in his old age used to be carried into church by his friends at Ephesus, and that when asked to address the congregation he would just say this, "Little children, love one another." Someone asked him why he repeated the same exhortation so often, and he answered, "Because it is the Lord's commandment, and if it only be fulfilled, it is enough." Truly love is the fulfilling of the law.

We want peace amont the nations of the earth ; we want peace throughout the Christian Church and in every parish. I tell you nothing less than the truth when I say that the only way to attain it is for every man and woman to cultivate the Christian spirit of love.

IV.

REPENTANCE AND FORGIVENESS.

"If we say that we have no sin we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us : but if we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."—1 John i. 8, 9.

NOR is it only a question of *saying* that we have no sin. Without verbally denying our defects and wrongs we may by a certain moral insensitiveness almost wholly ignore them, and thus deceive ourselves. It is easy to drift into sheer shallowness and live a lie.

CONFESSION.

Let us get down to realities, however unpleasant the discoveries. We know that we have not loved God as we ought ; we have not always given Him first place when His will has been in conflict with our own material interest. Where the alternatives have been a rigorous obedience to God's commandment or the gaining of money or some other form of self-gratification we have not been consistently loyal to our baptismal vows, and for less than thirty pieces of silver we have sold our Lord to purchase with the proceeds some species of self-indulgence.

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We have not loved God enough on all occasions to make any considerable sacrifice of comfort or ambition in order to serve His purpose. Often we have preferred our own idols.

Nor have we loved one another as we ought. Knowing that we are brethren, we have often flouted this principle and behaved as if it were non-existent. We recall occasions when there has been little or no recognition of family relationship in our dealings one with another, when, indeed, there have been suspicions and recriminations as if we were a medley of mutually hostile individuals or tribes. Again and again we have been guilty of narrowness of outlook and uncharitableness.

It is good for us from time to time to face up to these defects and wrongs ; it is bad for us to pursue our way in a pæan of self-approval as if all were as well as possible with us. Let us acknowledge our faults and shortcomings in not loving God and our fellowmen as we ought. Let us clear ourselves of that facile optimism that merely covers a spiritual disease that may corrupt one's whole character. Let us look into our own hearts, and, like the Psalmist of old, see whether there be not some way of wickedness within. And for this we must have a little quiet time at fairly frequent intervals. We can hardly cultivate the Christian character in this busy world without pausing now and then to remove the dust that so easily settles on the soul amid the whirl of life's perpetual motion. Perhaps I may be so far personal as to say that I cannot estimate how much I owe to my tenacious habit of securing a little silence in the course of each day in which to

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think upon God and consider in what relationship I stand to Him. It is in the stillness of meditation that we see our faults and confess them to God.

RENUNCIATION.

But the mere acknowledgment of faults is quite inadequate. They must be renounced. This necessity brings in another element—that of grief and sorrow. The sins will be deplored because they have wounded the loving heart of God and spoilt our best selves. Our wills must be pitted against them as things to be expelled, and we shall resolve by the grace of God to be free from their domination in days to come. We shall recognise our sins for what they are—not just venial pleasantries that are excusable in human nature, but betrayals and disloyalties of the serious sort. We shall abhor them as enemies of God and ourselves. That is indeed what God requires of us; it is the essential preliminary to Divine pardon and the soul's emancipation. As well as discover and identify our sins, we must lament them. The mind and heart must be turned in utter distaste against them. We must repent.

FORGIVENESS.

“If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” The teaching of the New Testament is clear beyond all question that where there is true contrition there is also Divine pardon. On no other truth did Jesus lay greater stress. Again

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and again we observe in His dealings with individuals that where the ground was prepared the grace of forgiveness was instantly and liberally outpoured. To the sick of the palsy—"Thy sins be forgiven thee"; to the woman taken in adultery—"Neither do I condemn thee; go, sin no more"; to the returned prodigal—"Rejoice with me, for this my son was dead and is alive"; to the penitent prostitute—"Her sins which are many are forgiven, for she loved much." This utter readiness of the Father to forgive was revealed by Jesus and received by His hearers as perhaps the most characteristic part of the Gospel. The kernel of many a sermon by St. Peter and St. Paul who went blazing a trail in a darkened world was "Repent and be forgiven." And after nearly two thousand years it is still the dominant message, for it is what God most wants to say to His children, and therefore what every preacher feels it pre-eminently his duty to proclaim. It is a message, too, for which the world is longing. Someone has said that people are not worrying about their sins to-day. That is a statement which requires some qualification. They are not worrying in quite the same way that they did under the penetrating spell of Wesley's preaching. The penitence may be less emotional, even less specific; but it is not less real. We are conscious of deep wrongs in our midst as a society, and in ourselves as individuals. We know that the coming of the Kingdom of God is hindered by sin, and we acknowledge that in that sin we all have a share. We want the old assurance that God is willing to forgive our offences—some of them secret and known only to ourselves,

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some of them notorious and a public scandal. And Jesus brings us the desired news and proclaims through His death and resurrection that the love of God is such that He must and does forgive.

What, then, is this forgiveness? It is the blotting out of those wrongs of which we have been guilty—making us as though these things had never been. That is why words like “cleansing” and “healing” are so often used in this connection. Forgiveness is closing an old account, and the beginning of a new and happier relationship. It means emancipation from certain evil forces that had asserted themselves, and the freedom of the soul to engage in better things. There is a new orientation of the mind towards more wholesome interests, and the result is a higher quality of conduct and character.

But we have this to bear in mind. The conviction of forgiveness is essential to its reality. Psychologically it is incredible that a man or woman who continues to be afflicted with a sense of sin is really forgiven. We have our part to do in the whole process. It seems to me that our blessed Lord in His personal dealings with individuals as well as in His general discourses made it clear that God's gifts are not merely projected from outside, but that they needs must be received and appropriated from within. How else can the gift be complete and effective? When we have in penitence confessed our sins to God, we must believe that He blots them out and gives us a fresh start. Only so is the gift brought to fruition; only so can we go on our way rejoicing, thankful to be relieved

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of a burden from off our conscience, and, taking care that by the help of the indwelling Spirit we do not fall back into those moral defects which God in His mercy has cast into oblivion.

But there are many who find it difficult thus to quiet their conscience. That is evident from the number that consult a Missioner during his special ministry in a parish for ten days or so. The Church in its wisdom has made particular provision for them. In the Prayer Book, everyone who cannot quiet his own conscience, but requires further comfort or advice, is exhorted to come to the parish priest, "or to some other discreet or learned minister of God's Word and open his grief, that by the ministry of God's Holy Word he may receive the benefit of absolution, together with spiritual counsel and advice, to the quieting of his conscience and avoiding of all scruple and doubtfulness." It is encouraging to reflect that of late years there has been in our own Church a large increase in the number of people who make use of the ministry of reconciliation and assurance, and find relief and happiness thereby. Failing by themselves to be utterly persuaded of forgiveness, they seek the help of their priest, and through his advice and pronouncement find that peace of mind which is essential to the development of the Christian character. I can say from personal knowledge and repeated proof that it is well for many a man and woman that our blessed Lord commissioned His Church to do this great and responsible service of absolving and retaining sins. "As the Father hath sent Me, even so send I you. And when He had said this,

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He breathed on them and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whosoever sins ye forgive, they are forgiven unto them; whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained."

Whether with or without the aid of such a ministry, it is our Christian obligation to believe that God, our loving Father, forgives us our sins, and that we may face the future with courage and new power. Do not continue to brood over sins and make of them a mawkish obsession. Dr William Brown warned us the other day at the annual conference of the Guild of Health against a morbid conscientiousness engendered by a false idea of God. Out of his wealth of experience he stated that in many instances physical maladies were due to an agitated conscience, and that a sense of Divine pardon had often proved to be a psychological cure. Thus does modern science confirm what Jesus implied in His treatment of the paralytic whose restless conscience probably reacted on his physical condition—"Thy sins be forgiven thee . . ." then, "Rise, take up thy bed, and walk." Inward peace is a human necessity for soul and body. Believe that upon true repentance the guilty past is buried in oblivion. A new vista opens out before you. Let there be no turning back, no hankering for the old indulgences, no doubting of the fact of forgiveness. Look outward and onward and God be with you.

V.

SPIRITUAL PROGRESS.

"Out of weakness were made strong."—Hebrews xi. 34.

SPIRITUAL progress presupposes spiritual freedom. So long as we are burdened with a sense of sin and the conscience is stricken by reason of failure we cannot reach out to higher attainments and put forth our best. We must know that God forgives, and that we are free to move forward and to do better. There must be in the heart an assurance that the weight of sins has been removed before we can stride out with confidence upon the highway of moral and spiritual progress.

OUR AIM.

But we need not only emancipation, but also a clear vision of the right objective. What is the Christian's primary aim? It is not as is sometimes represented to get into somewhere called Heaven, nor is it to secure some personal bliss and happiness for himself. The true and understanding Christian has before him an ideal—a mental picture of that which is most worth attaining; and that ideal is

embodied for him in the character of Jesus Christ. He believes that to be the highest prize of human life, and makes it his one outstanding aim. The writer to the Hebrews says magnificently, "Let us fling aside every encumbrance and the sin that so easily entangles our feet. And let us run with patient endurance the race that lies before us, simply fixing our gaze upon Jesus, our Prince Leader in the faith, who will also award us the prize." We are to think no longer of the old lapses and evil practices; God in His mercy has made them as though they had never been; we are to fix our gaze upon Jesus in all His goodness and beauty and press forward in humble imitation of Him through all our daily occupations. Those of us who are baptized into the name of Christ and profess to be His disciples are to be chiefly concerned with reproducing His spirit and character in ourselves here and now.

I believe the universe is so ordered that it is when we are thus dominated by Him we best serve the true interest of our own personalities. It is one of the strange paradoxes of human life that when we seek to serve ourselves with no reference to a higher Power our effort fails most completely, and that when we yield ourselves to the influence of Jesus Christ and let Him shape our outlook and will, we realise ourselves most fully and bring our personalities to their highest value.

Nor is it only our own truest interest that we serve in serving Him. We serve also the best and truest interest of the world at large. The direst need of the world to-day, as always, is men and women in whose hearts the reign of Christ is estab-

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lished. Not only the good, but also the happiness, of the world is waiting for more and more of us to exhibit the qualities which Jesus alone can impart. The more there is of Him in our judgments and actions the better for the world in general. We have therefore everything worthy to encourage us to persevere in cultivating the Christian character.

ENVIRONMENT.

Now, there is in the mind of every man a mental picture that simultaneously fascinates and dominates him. That is true of the miser, the drunkard, the sensualist, the artist, the saint. Each follows in act and conduct what he has fondled and cherished in his imagination. Nothing affects a man more than his mental environment. The surest way to cleanse and elevate the character is not to enter deliberately into conflict with the temptations to do base and degrading things. The mere fact of concentrating attention upon them tends to increase their power. No; the better way is to cultivate a higher passion which by its own inherent force will rout the baser inhabitants of the heart and take their place. This power belongs to Jesus. He is both more potent and more satisfying than all and sundry competitors, and He wins again in the soul of every child of man who loves and trusts Him the victory that He won Himself on every moral battlefield.

But we all need a great deal of help to come thus into possession of this Power that will enable us to make moral and spiritual progress. It is not

easy of attainment. The words which I quoted just now from the Epistle to the Hebrews imply that the way of progress is slow and arduous. The Christian has set his feet upon a path that is steep and tortuous, especially in the early stages, and its following often involves self-discipline, sacrifice, and perseverance. The line of least resistance is to remain on the low levels of past experience ; but no one who is content with that will ever reach his fullest powers or attain the true purpose of life. We are destined for adventure and progress. Knowing that Jesus can ensure this upward movement in every soul that trusts Him, how can we come increasingly into possession of Him? Here comes one of the main purposes of the Church.

It seems to me clear that when our Lord brought His followers together into a fellowship He meant to create an outward environment in which they would derive help from one another and thus find partial protection from the onslaughts of the pagan world. They formed a society which had higher ideals in their souls, and they could better hold on to them because they moved in an environment in which those ideals were established and frankly avowed. The Church is the same to-day as then in outward form and inward spirit ; a body of people who have committed themselves as disciples of Jesus Christ. Can anyone doubt that despite imperfections the Church even now does offer—and most of all to young people—a more helpful atmosphere for the development of the Christian character than the outside world? It is a great and strenuous task to go on from strength to strength

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in Christian virtue, and we need for it the aid that comes from moving in an environment that is favourable. This does not mean that we are to separate ourselves from the world ; it does mean that we are wise to associate with men and women who share our convictions and cherish the same ideals.

I am equally convinced that Jesus has especially entrusted to His fellowship the conveying of God's gifts to men. The Christian Church, however marred by faults, is the normal channel of Divine grace. Within her fold prayer and worship are practised and the sacraments are administered ; and these are means of uplifting human souls into communion with God. Thus the Church does provide for us the inestimable aid of the right environment for receiving the power that makes spiritual progress possible. I want to emphasise this very strongly, for there are many in these days who have lost the true conception of the Church. They approve of Christian morality, and are apparently full of admiration for the Christian character, but they are almost hostile to institutional religion and hold aloof from the Church. I would ask them to pause, set aside every prejudice, and reconsider the whole situation. I cannot but believe that if they did so they would take a different view of the Church's relationship to the Christian life, and avail themselves of what God in His wisdom has established and preserved to help them. Think of the Church not as a select company of saints, but as God's appointed means of winning and training imperfect men unto salvation.

AN EXAMPLE.

There is on record for us in the New Testament and other early documents the story of a young man whose example must put heart into everyone who fears he may fail in his vocation as a Christian. John Mark, in the first flush of enthusiasm, set out with St. Barnabas and St. Paul on a missionary journey. It was a fine impulse, but he had not counted the cost. The hardships and disappointments to which they were exposed were allowed to damp his ardour, and before long, in Perga of Pamphylia, he deserted his friends and failed his Master. The promising youth returns to Jerusalem in disgrace. So strongly did St. Paul resent this vacillation that at a later stage he stubbornly refused to readmit Mark into their company. But this is only the first chapter. The young man is again with St. Barnabas on a mission, and so well did he acquit himself that St. Paul himself welcomes him at a later stage, and makes repeated mention of him as a faithful fellow-worker. It seems that subsequently he went with St. Peter to Alexandria, of which he became the first bishop. And we cannot forget that to him we owe one of the Gospels—the first of the four to be written. So John Mark made good after all. “Out of weakness became strong.” His is an example of moral and spiritual progress that may well encourage those who contemplate the process of cultivating the Christian character.

There is not one one of us for whom some such development is not possible. Whatever flaws and weaknesses have marred our past we can outgrow

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them by re-dedicating ourselves to the call and challenge of Jesus Christ. We need none of us be moral failures. Recovery is within the grasp of everyone who will open his mind and heart to the grace of God. Out of weakness we too may become strong and steadfast, loyal and true. Believe in the power of God to make you so, and set your will upon the Christian character. That is the way of spiritual progress.

VI.

PRAYER.

"Continue in prayer."—Colossians iv. 2.

WE are keeping before us all the time the making of a Christian. The secret behind that process is the man's relationship to God, and therefore intercourse with God is vital to it. A great deal has been written and said of late years in favour of interpreting prayer in the widest possible sense, so as to include in it the full range of human life. "To work is to pray." This comprehensive and practical view of the subject is both right and beneficial, and we must never lose sight of it. On the other hand, we do well to remember that the first and most obvious meaning of prayer is conscious and deliberate communion with God—a definite act of the human will. If this more precise view of it is ignored, the more general view is likely to become largely illusory. Let us then think of prayer for the present in its more elementary and obvious sense—man in actual intercourse with his Maker, speaking with God.

PERSONAL INTERCOURSE.

The first thing we try to realise is that we are in the presence of a living Person who knows and

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loves us—our Father. We shut out the world for the first moment and concentrate the mind and heart upon God. Then, and not till then, are we ready to speak. It is well to begin with acknowledging His loving-kindness, and thank Him for innumerable blessings. We shall think of the needs of others, some far away, some near and neighbourly ; and we shall ask for the supply of our own personal needs in soul and body. The intercourse will be real, natural, and frank, as that of a trustful child with its father. And never a day ought to pass without it. Whatever else we forego, this personal communion with God must have its place as an essential element in our daily life. If the Christian character is derived from God through Christ ; if, as surely we acknowledge, it is not something which we ourselves create, but something which He transmits into our hearts and enables us to build up, then prayer is patently indispensable to it. The very start and the whole process depend upon the soul finding frequent touch with God.

AIDS TO PRAYER.

But we do not find it easy to pray. There are all sorts of hindrances in the way. St. Paul seems to me to have had them in mind when he urged the Colossians to *continue* in prayer. The verb implies an effort, the exercise of a resolute will. It suggests the need of some rule, and loyal adherence to it. "Continue in prayer." There is an old and good custom in this country, and other countries too, for that matter, to set apart a little time every

night and morning in one's bedroom for this purpose; and if one can supplement this with a few minutes' quiet meditation in course of the day it is very helpful. We need some such method and regularity to ensure that we do hold intercourse with God and refresh ourselves with spiritual realities. To these more private and personal devotions we do well to add the practice of worshipping in fellowship with our neighbours on the Lord's own day in the Lord's own house. A special blessing attaches to this corporate act, and no Sunday should be allowed to pass without it. Our blessed Lord has set an example in these things. It was a common practice with Him to withdraw from the din and dust of the world, and on a mountain side or in the lonely wilderness to concentrate mind and heart in communion with His Father. It was also His habit to worship in the synagogue on the Sabbath day. He deliberately accepted and conformed to these devotional customs and used them as aids to the life of prayer. I stress all this, because I cannot but observe that it is becoming fashionable in our own day to make light of these time-honoured methods. There are people who adopt a superior air towards them and seem almost to despise the old custom of conforming to regular habits of private prayer and public worship. I can imagine a modern man saying, "I don't go on my knees like a little child to pray at night, because I can pray just as well whilst I'm undressing." Another might say, "I've given up going to church, because I can worship better walking in the fields." This kind of talk is very plausible and there is no doubt that

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it is luring many people away from the beaten track of devotional observances. The question is: "Is there more or less real prayer in consequence?" Most of us, I believe, are human enough to be assisted by regular methods and deliberate actions. It is not because we are especially virtuous, but because we are frail that we adopt definite and purposeful means of communing with God. Let us get down to realities. The man most likely to continue to pray is the man who will make a rule of going on his knees to do so night and morning; and the man who can most be depended upon to worship his Maker is he who will put himself to the slight inconvenience of going to Church to do so Sunday by Sunday in fellowship with his neighbours. I submit, then, that if, in the words of St. Paul, we are to continue in prayer it is well for us to conform to those practices that have sustained it all through the ages.

EFFECT OF PRAYER.

We have observed that prayer is personal intercourse with God—personal intercourse, therefore, with Him in whom all perfection consists. The fulness of goodness and truth and beauty is in Him. Now, in human relationships we know that we are affected by the character of those with whom we associate most frequently and intimately. Many a one has been uplifted morally and spiritually by the best kind of companionship. It is a law of the universe, because its spring is at the very heart of God. It is not so much by begging for, this or

that, as by the mere fact of intercourse and growing like-mindedness with God that we receive from His inexhaustible treasure-house those blessings that enrich our character. The idea that prayer is just an accumulation of petitions is fundamentally wrong. Prayer is the growth of personal friendship between man and his Maker, the gradual recovery of that relationship when God walked with Adam in the cool of the evening. Through this friendship something passes from the Source into the human soul—something of God's own spirit and quality, so that he who really prays becomes more and more God-like. It is all quite simple and natural. I kiss my child, and thereby not only express but also increase my affection for it. You thank God on your knees for His many mercies to you, and the very fact of doing so heightens your gratitude. Gratitude secures a firmer place in your character. You think of the needs of others in your prayers, and the result is a wider and deeper sympathy with your fellow men. A larger measure of God's own tenderness passes into you and enriches your disposition with a desire to help all who suffer. You ask Him before whom you bow to give you more of the mind of Christ, and it is a natural consequence of that petition that you should judge and act accordingly in the various occupations of life. Prayer is the channel through which the graces of God flow into human hearts. A man or woman who really prays cannot but be better for it.

We all want to make moral and spiritual progress, and uplift to a higher plane the whole range of conduct and character. Prayer is manifestly in-

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dispensable to all this. It is the most potent of all practices in the making of a Christian. Let every soul who looks wistfully towards a nobler and a better life resolve that he or she will make a habit of holding intercourse every day with God. Through that contact will flow those Christian qualities which in their plenitude are found alone in God.

VII.

THE HOLY COMMUNION.

"And they continued steadfastly . . . in the breaking of bread."—Acts ii. 42.

IT is recorded in this verse that the Christian life was sustained in the early disciples by four means, namely, the teaching of the Apostles, the fellowship among themselves, the breaking of bread, and the prayers. These were the observances through which the Church ministered to the various congregations, and in them the people found the help they needed to cultivate the Christian character. We note in passing that the Christian Religion, even in those very early days, was manifestly becoming institutional and orderly. It is difficult to imagine how it can successfully ever be otherwise in human society.

Among the four marks of the early Church we observe the breaking of bread. This was in fact a meal which the Christians who met together—each congregation—had in common, and to which they attached a solemn and religious significance. How did it come about ?

THE INSTITUTION.

At a time of great solemnity, when the shadow of the Cross was already upon Him, Jesus had

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brought together His Apostles to celebrate the Jewish Feast of the Passover. When this was fully ended, He supplemented it with a special ordinance of His own. Placing a loaf of bread and a cup of wine before Himself He made this tremendous utterance over them: "This is My body which is given for you" . . . "this is My blood which is shed for you." Then He passed them round and bade His friends partake of them. "Do this in remembrance of Me." The note of command is unmistakable. Jesus desired His followers to perpetuate this solemn act all down the ages. This sacrament has therefore an essential place in the Christian ministry. It is not, as is too often assumed, an "extra," or something that may be properly regarded as optional, if not even superfluous. Nor is it intended to be a delicacy for exclusive saints. It is the Father's special means of sustaining all His children; it is food for sinners. We have in its institution one of those few fundamental injunctions to which we ought to attach the utmost importance. The Holy Communion is no invention of keen ecclesiastics. Christ Himself ordained it, and entrusted it to His Church for a purpose that is made transparently clear in the institution itself. The people who turn their backs upon it, as certain Jews are said by Ezekiel to have turned their backs upon the Temple, are less than fully obedient to their Lord. I feel sure that it is only because a vast number of Christians have not realised how definitely we are called to this Sacrament by Christ Himself that they absent themselves so lightly.

ITS PURPOSE.

When He instituted this Sacrament Jesus evidently had in view certain specific purposes. "Do this in remembrance of Me." It was a memorial act, designed to remind men of Him throughout all time. I think we have associated the Holy Communion too exclusively with the death of our Lord, and too little with His whole personality. The institution, it is true, was associated with the Cross, but His own instruction was that the meal was to be a memorial of *Him*, not merely of His sacrificial death. When we partake of the bread and wine we are to recall His Incarnation, His coming into the world at the cost of infinite sacrifice to reveal the love of God and to show men the way of life. The Holy Communion is a perpetual reminder of all that Jesus Christ has meant to mankind, His example, His teaching, His whole personality. "In remembrance of ME."

It is equally clear that the Sacrament was intended to be a special pledge of His presence. We observed just now that He said over the bread, "This is My body," and over the cup, "This is My blood." Manifestly the words are a clear promise that Jesus Himself will be present through the power of the Holy Spirit, and will indeed impart Himself through this ordained and consecrated channel. Is not that enough? We have here the most explicit assurance of communion with God.

There is another blessing in this beautiful ordinance. It is not only communion with God; it is also communion with one another—a sacred act of

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human fellowship. This is an aspect which has been rather overshadowed of late. Many regard their Communion entirely as an act of personal devotion, something intensely private concerning God and the individual soul. It is that obviously; but there is also this other element—that it is a corporate act wherein we join with those who share the blessed privilege with us. The Holy Communion binds us together in a sacred brotherhood. We are united afresh to one another as often as we partake of the one bread and drink of the same cup. From this point of view there is much to be said for arranging from time to time a corporate Service at which the largest possible number of people can communicate together. Such an occasion is profoundly impressive.

These are some, though by no means all, of the high purposes which the Sacrament of the Holy Communion serves.

SUITED TO OUR NATURE.

You may have wondered at times why so rich a gift as God's own life should be associated with such humble and physical things as bread and wine. The answer is really quite simple. The gift itself is absolute, and dependent upon nothing but its own Divine Source. But it is natural that its conveyance to us should take some form because we are ourselves a sacrament, consisting of body as well as soul. So far from being unscientific, this belief in the instrumentality of physical elements like bread and wine for a spiritual purpose is in full

accord with the latest discoveries of science. The old rigid partition between spirit and matter upon which scientists used to insist is rapidly disappearing. Science itself is helping to remove it, and speaks confidently to-day of the nearness of life to all things physical, and of the interplay of spirit and matter. This working principle, which found its highest expression in the Incarnation of the Son of God, is now discovered to be, like all things good and true, universal in its application. In the person of Jesus of Nazareth the Supreme Spirit came into this world in human flesh, and was dependent, like you and I, on food and drink, fresh air and rest. And yet was it not through this material body, through speech and touch, that He brought spiritual sustenance and power to men? So in the Sacraments God has deigned to use material things as channels for His spiritual gifts. On however exalted a pedestal some people may talk disparagingly of this association of earth with heaven, most of us are human enough to find real help in it. This recognition of the material part of our nature, this bestowal upon it of a part to play in the attainment of union with God, does facilitate the whole process. We can enter into it so much more fully and understandingly because it is made palpable through physical elements. It is God deigning to meet us half-way. In the Holy Communion pre-eminently Francis Thompson's words are true—

O world invisible, we view thee,
O world intangible, we touch thee,
O world unknowable, we know thee,
Inapprehensible, we clutch thee.

A3

FAITH AND EFFECT.

I have said that here our Lord gives us His own Divinely-human life and spirit. Someone has remarked—and it is a penetrating criticism which we do well to lay to heart—that many Christians ask too much for things, too little for God Himself. What is the chief end of human life? It is to grow in the likeness of Christ, to cultivate increasingly the Christian character. That is the noblest objective in the whole universe. But it would be misleading to represent it as easy to attain, constituted as we are, and placed in a world with innumerable counter attractions. No one who has made the effort will deny that we need perpetual help. Unaided we shall fail. We look to a greater than ourselves, to Him in whom all that we seek is found in its fulness. Only Christ Himself through the power of the Holy Spirit can lift us into His own likeness. “This is My body” . . . “this is my blood.” He offers here His own life and spirit in the most palpable and winsome way. Here most obviously is the soul’s opportunity to receive the gift that is indispensable to its own moral and and spiritual advancement.

Our part is to believe wholeheartedly first in the presence of Jesus in this Sacrament, and secondly in His power to transform and uplift our lives. Have faith that He really does impart Himself by this means, and that by virtue of His presence within you it is the most natural thing in the world for you to grow more like Him, to become increasingly Christian in inward character.

In the Sacrament of the Holy Communion we have beyond all doubt a special means of grace. Let us use it faithfully and reverently. The early disciples continued steadfastly in the breaking of bread. This means in modern speech that they were regular communicants, coming together at stated intervals with a fidelity that overcame quite as many hindrances as those which beset men to-day. They set us an example which we cannot neglect without serious loss. To them this simple Sacrament was one of the chief means of sustaining in them the life and spirit of their Master and Saviour. It is no less potent and effective to-day. For you and for me, by the mercy of God, it may be a very real aid as we try to cultivate the Christian character.

VIII.

THE MINISTRY OF BEAUTY.

"Consider the lilies of the field how they grow ! they toil not, neither do they spin : yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these."
—St. Matthew vi. 28, 29.

THESE lilies were not rare and costly plants such as grow in greenhouses. They grew profusely in the fields and were to be seen and plucked in all directions. In form they were rather like our gladioli ; in colour they ranged from pinkish purple to blue, and would light up patches of the landscape with their brilliant hues.

WHAT CONSTITUTES BEAUTY ?

This was the scene on which in all probability Jesus actually looked ~~out~~ when he said, "Consider the lilies of the field." It impressed Him as a thing of beauty. And then by contrast His mind travelled back to Solomon and his pomp. Solomon was a sybarite, moving in an atmosphere that glittered with precious stones and rare possessions. He was always straining after grandeur. But what he achieved was not to be compared with the quiet effortless beauty of those fields covered with common lilies.

What is the real difference between ostentatious display and true beauty ? It is not just a question

of personal taste and opinion ; it goes much deeper. Beauty is a principle inherent in God, like goodness and truth, to which man responds because he is made in the image of God. We are aided to identify it by its effect upon us. True beauty will not make us think of ourselves or merely move us to sentimentality ; on the contrary, it will lift us out of ourselves and fill us with a sense of spiritual values. No one can read the accounts that have come down to us of Solomon's Court and fail to observe that it was largely organised for self-aggrandisement. It was of the earth, earthy. The king himself too, as he doted upon the material earth became increasingly vain and developed a passion for human homage. The whole atmosphere was fundamentally different from that mountain side or quiet nook from which you contemplate patches of green and grey and gold, radiant with colour and life, yet perfectly simple and unobtrusive. Both nature and the work of a true artist, reflect like a mirror the beauty of God, and when we get a glimpse of that beauty, whether in the tender bloom of a flower, or in the skilled production of the craftsman, it awakens in us those finer elements that God has implanted in us.

DIVINE INTENTION.

Many of us are apt to regard the world of nature as something placed at our disposal mainly as a means of livelihood. But the Bible presents a view of it other than utilitarian. Come back in thought to the story of the Creation. The trees were intended not only to bear fruit and protect life, but

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also to adorn the earth. "Every tree that is pleasant to the sight"—so we read in Genesis. Jesus was constantly finding delight in the beautiful objects that surrounded Him on the hillsides and coastlines of Galilee. John Ruskin remarked that the clouds assume their ever-varying shapes and shades of colour for no prosaic purpose, but just in order to make a vault above our heads that is exquisite to behold. We live and move in a world that is designed not merely to be the scene of un-^{mitting} pitying toil and material profit, but also to give pleasure and spiritual refreshment. ^{we are} I am reminded of the farmer who, on a lovely spring morning greeted his neighbour with the remark, "Beautiful day"; and then, as if ashamed of having said anything so aesthetic hastened to give it a commercial value, "Very good for the corn."

Lay hold of this great truth—that God who created and still controls this world is Himself the Source of all Beauty, and that it is the most natural thing in the world for His work to partake of the same quality. When at first He beheld everything that He made He was satisfied that it was true to Himself and would delight the eyes of men. We teachers and preachers have recently laid much emphasis on the goodness of God, and we do well in these rather ^{relaxing} days to insist that He is essentially ethical and will brook no compromise where moral principles are at stake. But there is another aspect no less important—God is Beauty. Jesus always revealed Him as one in whose Personality Beauty is as inherent as goodness and truth. It is vitally important to our understand-

ing of God and to our whole philosophy of life and character that we should cherish this conviction. No one who thinks out its implications can doubt that it is a conviction which is bound to have far-reaching effects.

PRACTICAL INFLUENCE OF BEAUTY.

Let me mention some directions in which it seems to me a sense of the Beauty of God will profoundly affect us.

It will leave its impress upon our conduct. Knowing that the Source of it all is perfect Beauty, we shall see in the world around us reflections of Him who made it, and through these sacraments we shall the more easily hold communion with Him. The whole atmosphere is one of purity and serenity, which suggests and facilitates a clean and honourable life. You cannot be a lover of Beauty, ever ready to appreciate it in the home, at your work, or on a walk, without moral benefit. Such a habit, lifts you to a higher plane whereon it will be more in keeping with your inward state to do the right thing. Something of the very beauty that so often delights you sinks into your soul and becomes part of you, and your pleasure henceforth cannot be in things sordid and debasing, but in things pure and elevating. [It is said that Thoreau, after sitting on a gate for a long while quietly meditating upon the beauty of a meadow, exclaimed as he came away, "I have probably got more out of that meadow than ever its owner has had."] Psychology is teaching us to-day that we are influenced much

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more than we know by the mental pictures that we carry about with us. If you have inward fellowship with what is clean and beautiful, and cherish thoughts that are pure and lovely and of good report, your conduct in all the affairs of life is much more likely to be clean and honourable.]

[Secondly, we shall be moved to make an offering to God of worship and adoration. A deepened sense of His Beauty will increase in us a desire to give Him the best that we can command. A man who is convinced that God is the All-glorious cannot be indifferent to the duty of worship, or slovenly in the practice of it. We shall want to make the edifice, the music, the ceremonial of God's house as good and artistic as we can make them. There is, I believe, to-day a reawakening of the artistic sense, especially in young people, and if we are to attract them to the fellowship of worship we must make the Services congenial to their sense of fitness. God's own shrine ought to be at least as beautiful as any other place that attracts and interests the discriminating.] It is pleasant to observe that there are nowadays welcome signs of real improvement in this respect.

[Lastly, a conviction of the Beauty of God, and of its manifestation in the world, would make an enormous difference to our enjoyment of life. Recall what it meant to Our Blessed Lord in His strenuous days on earth. How it relieved the pressure of toil and anxiety, and brought Him gleams of joy ! We do well to emulate His example in appreciating the beauty of common things around us. Do not despise what is small and familiar. If you do not

appreciate the humblest daisy, it matters little that ~~you~~ ^{but} you are impressed by some noble plant ; if ~~you~~ ^{but} you hear no music in the running brook, who cares that ~~you~~ ^{are} you are moved by the roar of the Niagara ! It gives me unfeigned pleasure to listen to a symphony by Beethoven or a chorus by Bach, but I am still more thankful that I can listen with rapture to the song of the common thrush. Almost all of us have opportunities nowadays to enjoy objects of beauty ; they are more accessible than ever. Listen and look for them near at hand.

The drift of pinions, would we hearken,
Beats at our own clay-shuttered doors.

The angels keep their ancient places—
Turn but a stone, and start a wing !
'Tis ye, 'tis your estrangèd faces,
That miss the many-splendoured thing.

If you accustom yourself to observe and appreciate things beautiful in the common routine of life, you will enjoy life so much the more. And the enjoyment will be of such a nature that it will bring you moral benefit ; for it will stir emotions and awaken aspirations that will intensify a desire for purity of thought, clean conduct, and upright dealing. Although the process is often unconscious we have an irresistible tendency to assimilate the character of our mental companions. Therefore our Lord's behest had a very far-reaching and moral significance—" Consider the lilies."

IX.

SELF-DISCIPLINE.

"Every man that striveth in the games is temperate in all things."—I Corinthians ix. 25.

MAN is a strange mixture. He can rise to glorious heights, and descend to unfathomable depths. One obvious explanation of this is the fact that his scope is not limited to the present: he has powers of reflection and anticipation which enormously enhance his potentiality for good and ill. More than all other creatures man partakes of the infinity of God. We have also to bear in mind that he is born not only with this immeasurable capacity, but also with certain instincts and desires which he has inherited from his forefathers. The strongest and commonest desire of all is for life. We all want to live a full, vigorous life. That is well. The trouble is the erroneous notion that the way to attain life is to give all our native desires full and unfettered freedom. This undirected indulgence of the instincts leads not to life, but to death, for we live in a world of temptations, and we are not so fully divine and good by nature as to be protected against straying into the serfdom of physical appetites. "To be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace."

ST. PAUL'S ANALOGY.

St. Paul had evidently been a shrewd observer of the Isthmian games in Corinth. They were famous throughout the civilised world, and the standard of attainment was very high. Every competitor underwent a long course of training. Conscious of the powers of his body, and having before him the definite aim of excelling in a contest, he brought those powers under the discipline of mind and will. His policy was not the wild inane one of giving them indiscriminate free play, but to control and conserve them, and make them as efficient as possible for excelling and winning. St. Paul uses the athlete to illustrate his own vocation as a Christian. In either case there is first the fixing of a definite purpose ; then the direction of all available resources to attain the purpose. The goal is clear : " This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Then follows the discipline of all his energies, mental and physical, so that they may help and not hinder him to reach the desired goal. " I buffet my body, and bring it into subjection." That is the vocation of every Christian. He knows that the only way to attain fulness of life is to emulate the example of Jesus Christ and cultivate the Christian character. To this end therefore he bends his faculties and directs his innate instincts. He discriminates between those practices that are likely to help and those that are likely to hinder him in his main

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pursuit ; the economy he effects in rejecting the latter he invests in the former. There is no waste. All his resources are concentrated upon the one beneficent purpose of life.

That is the history of men who have achieved all down the ages. Look back the centuries and reflect a moment upon the saints and heroes whose personalities will for ever illumine the past, and whom in your heart of hearts you most admire and fain would emulate. How did they attain ? They chose their goal, and then deliberately directed their powers to that end. They were men and women of resolute will, who did not shrink from self-discipline and self-denial. Instead of frittering away their resources upon futile and harmful frivolities, they conserved them to the best and highest purpose. To-day from their altitudes of moral and spiritual attainment they unconsciously beckon to us—and especially to the young—to follow in their footsteps.

FREEDOM.

We are, I think, rather slow in responding just now. One reason is that we are at the high-tide of a reaction against repression and prudishness. The Puritanism of a hundred years ago which frowned upon innocent occupations like drama and dancing and recreative games finds little favour to-day, and is indeed effete. That might be all to the good ; but mankind has a tiresome way of swinging from one extreme to another, and the present generation is, I think in some danger of reacting too strongly to the taboos of the early Victorians. We are now

inclined to make a fetish of freedom. One of the most serviceable things that can be done in our time is to pause and consider what is freedom. Let us first be clear that it has no self-contained or independent existence. It must always be related to something, and its value depends entirely upon the purpose to which it is related. Let me illustrate its definition in this way: You have resolved to walk to London. Imagine a highway like the Great North Road quite near your home, with sign-posts to direct you every few miles. But you refuse to restrict yourself to this careful plan; you regard it as an infringement of your freedom. You choose rather to wander through a thousand irrelevant fields and go astray under the delusion that you are enjoying freedom. Real freedom depends, as I said, upon its relation to the purpose in view; and if your purpose is to get to London, it is the Great North Road, and not a network of fields unrelated to your purpose, that gives you freedom. The question is, what best helps you to get where you want to be? If you have a sane and beneficent purpose in view, and there are directions that will assist you to attain that purpose, you do not really enjoy freedom by flouting them; you merely commit a folly.

You want to make the best of yourself; you desire to live to the full and bring your personality to the utmost value. God in Christ has shown you the way. "I am come that they may have life and that they may have it more abundantly." The Bible and the Church have mapped out the road to travel, and the Holy Spirit will guide your feet

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to it. Following the road involves certain restrictions upon your movements—the rejection of this turning, the choice of that. It is only by conforming your footsteps to the directions that you will arrive. The freedom of self-control is vindicated in the lives of millions.

ACHIEVEMENT.

What was possible for them is possible for us by the grace of God. I want to emphasise this. We live in so highly a social and mechanical age that many have come to regard themselves as mere passengers on the social tide, or machines to be driven by some irresistible momentum. It is assumed that either we have individually no power of direction, or that it is unnecessary to exert it. This idea has no foundation in fact. The notion that we have not this power is not only erroneous, it is also paralysing; it is destructive of aspiration and fatal to effort. May Heaven deliver every one of us from such fatality. Man is not a helpless piece of mechanism or a mere straw on the strong current of life. We are endowed with power by the indwelling Spirit of God. We *can* direct our course, and by doing so we gain in strength and dignity.

Self-discipline is urged upon us as an essential element of the Christian character by our blessed Lord Himself and by the Christian saints of all ages. Instead of allowing ourselves to be helpless victims either of outward circumstances or of inward passions let us rise to master the situation. Therein

is true freedom. So shall we be saved from the slavery of practices like the worship of wealth, excessive drinking, and sexual indulgences. By marshalling all our amazing faculties to pursue the ideal set forth by Jesus Christ we shall bring them into unity and have peace at the core of our personality. The conflict of the early stages dies down, and we acquire the blessed habit of advancing from strength to strength, till we come "unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

X.

THE FELLOWSHIP.*

"Let us consider one another, to provoke unto love and to good works: not forsaking the gathering of ourselves together as the custom of some is, but exhorting one another."—Hebrews x. 24, 25.

THE keynote of this passage is the fellowship of Christians and its opportunities. The author has argued that in Christ we are made one family. Accepting this fellowship as a fact he exhorts the Christians of Jewish descent to exploit its far-reaching possibilities, and to make the utmost use of it to promote the Christian character.

THE STIMULUS OF FELLOWSHIP.

Christianity is more than a personal religion. It is not just one of many schemes, or even the best of them, to secure individual salvation. True, its most fundamental objective is to bring the human soul into the right relation to God, but that relation involves also his relation to human society. The pagan mystic often seeks escape from his surroundings and by sheer intensity of spirit which we cannot but admire soars aloft in a viewless flight of "the alone to the Alone." But that is not Christianity.

* Preached to Church workers.

You cannot be a good Christian all by yourself. As disciples of Jesus Christ, faithful to His teaching and example, we have to relate ourselves to our environment, and in our environment find opportunity and help to cultivate the Christian character. We have to "consider one another," and live, not as isolated individuals, or even as isolated congregations, but as a fellowship united in the Church.

The author of this Epistle states explicitly certain moral and spiritual results that will be promoted by living in close touch and sympathy with our fellow men.

First comes the stirring-up of the gift of love. There is in all of us a capacity for love. It is to-day one of those endowments that have become inherent in our nature. But like every other slowly acquired gift it needs exercise, if it is to grow. Left latent it will diminish or even die. We must have objects of affection, and put it into daily practice. How can we do this better than by mingling and co-operating with our fellow men? We shall not be in total agreement on all subjects; but we have something in common with all men, and a great deal with those who share our faith. Realising that we are children of the same Divine Father, seeking the extension and deepening of His Kingdom here on earth, we shall try to think and work alongside one another. Petty jealousies and rivalries will vanish from our midst. Enthusiasm for the common cause will weld us into unity. We shall evoke and stimulate that gift of love which God has implanted in our hearts, and which was intended to be the distinctive mark of every Christian—"By this shall

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all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one towards another."

Secondly, this fellowship will provoke to good works, *i.e.*, works which by their very nobility evoke the natural admiration of men. As a humble observer of Church life I am often amazed at the amount and nature of the work that is done by many of its members. When people talk of the Church as something that is half-dead, they must lose sight of much that is actual fact. It is becoming fashionable in some quarters to talk disparagingly of the Church's organisations. I want to say something for them, for it is through them that a vast amount of public and private service is ungrudgingly rendered. Through the length and breadth of the land groups of workers like Church Councils, Sunday School Teachers, District Visitors, and those engaged in promoting such agencies as the Church of England Men's Society, the Mothers' Union, the Girls' Friendly Society, and juvenile organisations, are doing sterling service which cannot be estimated. It is beyond calculation in earthly terms. Agencies of this kind call forth and stimulate good works which even the worldling cannot fail to admire. So the Church, the Body of Christ, operating through the fellowship of its members, provokes to love and good works.

CORPORATE WORSHIP.

We come now to another function of the fellowship. "Not forsaking the gathering of ourselves together." The late Bishop Westcott, in his masterly

commentary on this difficult Epistle, remarks that this is a very strong expression. It signifies more than neglecting a pious practice, or withdrawing from a voluntary circle; it signifies the abandonment of the family, an act of disloyalty to the Church, the very antithesis of playing the game. We know from contemporary history that it was the custom of those primitive Christians to gather together in the early morning of the first day of the week to "break bread" and worship as a congregation. Their service seems to have consisted chiefly of the Holy Communion and the singing of hymns in honour of Jesus. There is no doubt that they derived help and inspiration from these frequent gatherings. Nothing moves and elevates us more than corporate adoration. The surge of many voices uplifted together raises us nearest Heaven, and Heaven is often symbolised as a feast of music. But the music, mark you, is always a chorus or an orchestra, never a solo. And that is significant. Each contributes to the whole, and the whole contributes to each. The effectiveness of worship is impoverished by the absence of individual members; it gains in power by that which each brings into it. Our adoration will not be perfect till every soul is in the chorus. Meanwhile try and regard your attendance at public worship as an act of loyalty to the fellowship, as something which helps to make the service worthier of God and more helpful to the congregation. You are not just an isolated individual; you are a member of the Church, and the Church as a family has a claim upon you. Come and do your part, in the fellowship. That is what

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the author had in mind when he wrote, "not forsaking the gathering of ourselves together."

All this comes to light most palpably in the Eucharist, for there especially we have union with Christ, and through Him with one another. We partake of the one bread, and kneel side by side regardless of differences in rank, wealth, intelligence, and nationality. Our sense of brotherhood is heightened in the Eucharist, and without that loyal family feeling our worship will tend to be less constant, less inspiring, and less effective than it ought to be.

"Not forsaking the gathering of ourselves together, *as the custom of some is.*" The writer apparently had observed that not all the converts assembled in the appointed way. There were delinquents in those days as in these. Occasionally we meet men who regard corporate worship as unnecessary, who do not see that it serves a real purpose in our relation to God and our fellow men, but such folk are really not numerous. Personally, I think we are, in general, unnecessarily pessimistic on this subject of assembling on Sundays. If the number of worshippers is proportionately less than it was fifty years ago, I doubt if ever in the history of the Church its worship was less conventional and more genuine than it is to-day. Even numerically I think the tide is turning. My observation on frequent visits to small towns and villages is that there has begun a revival of public worship; and I have come to believe that if we clergy and laity concentrated upon definitely spiritual work the prospects of a widespread return to the fellowship of the Church are encouraging. The heart of

England is awakening to the fact that the neglect of Sunday observance and public worship must inevitably lead to the decline of real religion, and that the moral and spiritual state of the country is bound up with the support and vigour of the Church.

MUTUAL AID.

The author's remaining advice is expressed in the words, "exhorting one another," *i.e.*, helping and heartening one another. There would be some timid folk among those early Christians who might lapse under the pressure of ridicule and persecution. The stronger men must cheer and sustain them. Some in the Christian company would be backward—handicapped by ignorance and sluggishness; they must be stimulated by their better-equipped comrades. That is the beauty and service of fellowship. It is an arrangement by which the members can assist one another, and so raise the general level of efficiency.

Bishop Westcott observes that those Hebrew Christians were in special need of two things, and we need them hardly less to-day. First, courage. As Christians and Churchmen we are men of conviction, holding definite views on matters of fundamental importance. We stand for certain great truths which have their origin and authority not in this material world, but in God above. We must be loyal to those truths, and proclaim them without fear far and wide. In so doing we shall help and strengthen one another to uphold before the world

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those values which Jesus Christ revealed. Each will give something to the life of the fellowship, and each will derive something from it. The fellowship is an open field for mutual aid.

The second need is progress. If the Church were content merely to mark time it would soon be moribund. We must go forward, and whilst standing steadfast by the great unchanging truths revealed by the Incarnate Son of God we must be quick to adapt our methods to the age and light in which we live. Enterprise is essential. The Christian religion has still vast fields of life and territory to enter and consecrate both here at home and overseas. We are called to adventure. Only let us always be sure that what we seek is the glory of God and the welfare of the world.

XI.

CHRISTIAN CONDUCT.

"This is the way, walk ye in it."—Isaiah xxx. 21.

GOD has always revealed Himself to man as a moral Being whose will is wholly identified with righteousness. The most obvious distinction of the God of Israel from the gods of the surrounding nations was His ethical character. He loved goodness and hated iniquity, and required men to choose the one and reject the other. From the beginning His religion was intended to inspire moral conduct and to bear the fruit of good works; but it took the Israelites long ages to grasp and appreciate this fact. When Jesus came in the fulness of time He confirmed the ethical teaching of the eighth century prophets and their successors, and even added to it. He Himself set an example of conduct that was utterly stainless and perfect. "I am the way," He declared, implying that His mode of life as well as His own Person is the way to Heaven and the Father. ^{Now that} ~~Nay~~, more, we are to think of Him, not only as our example and the Goal towards which we should ever be reaching out, but also as the Way by which alone we can make the advance. It is this fact of Christ enabling us here and now by the Holy Spirit that puts heart into us, and makes

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our Master so dear and intimate to aspiring souls. Alice Meynell begins a beautiful poem thus :—

Thou art the Way,
Hadst Thou been nothing but the Goal
I cannot say
If Thou hadst ever met my soul.

The early disciples made so good a response to this declaration of our Lord's that they soon became distinguished from other men by the purity and nobility of their lives. Observers, noting their conduct in the normal affairs of life, associated them with Jesus. Indeed, the Christian Religion was often described in those early days as "The Way," because it seemed to be chiefly a new way of living, a fresh departure in the realm of conduct.

THE MEANING OF CONDUCT.

There are two things to observe about conduct. First, it is that part of a personality that has found expression in action; secondly, it is related to, although not invariably to be identified with, the inward character. It is not self-determined, but emerges from something, and has its antecedents. Consider its relation to character. Conduct is what a man *does*; character is what a man *is* at heart. Outward behaviour proceeds from an inward state, and merely expresses what prevails in the soul. "~~Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaketh,~~" said the Christ. The quality of speech and conduct depends upon the quality of the thoughts that we harbour and cherish. It is true that the quality is not always consistent. A man whose disposition is usually kind, or whose habits are

well-controlled, lapses on occasions and behaves on a plane much lower than his normal standard. We are apt to excuse him with the plea that "he is not himself." In reality, he is himself. The lapse expresses a defect in his character, and is by no means to be brushed aside as if it had no moral significance. The reason why there is outward inconsistency is that there is inward inconsistency. Conduct is a true interpretation of character.

Attempts have been made in most ages ~~from the~~ ~~sages of Egypt, Greece, and Rome, down to the~~ ~~modern rationalist~~ to regulate conduct by rules and principles. Many in our own day have the impression that great maxims like "live purely," "keep sober," "tell the truth" are sufficient moral equipment. Hence the prevalence of secularism as an adequate alternative to religion. The idea is as fallacious as it is plausible. Conduct emanates from a deeper spring than principles. Principles are of the head, implying knowledge of how to behave. They are admirable as guides to right action, and very useful as signposts to warn us against straying into danger and ruin. But it is now a well-established scientific fact that conduct is generally determined not by knowledge, but by the sentiments and affections that possess the soul. Let us take an imaginary case. An intelligent business man accepts the principle of honesty as utterly right for himself and society, and is conscious of its necessity in human life. There is complete intellectual assent. Suppose, now, this man, long engrossed in business, has developed an irresistible passion for money-making and is set upon amassing all the wealth he can

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seize. One day, the opportunity comes his way to make a big financial score by a plain evasion of integrity. Which side of him will win? The principle in his head, or the passion in his heart? The odds are overwhelmingly in favour of the latter. ~~For the heart is nearer the throne of his personality~~ than the head, and therefore more potent to provide the motive power that impels and determines action. Constituted as we are we cannot live the Christian life merely by rule of thumb, nor can we ensure moral conduct by mere knowledge and even acceptance of moral principles. Everything depends upon the ideal we cherish in our innermost soul.

The Christian religion offers us as the highest object of the heart's desire God revealed in Jesus Christ. Here is the ideal translated into human life. Do ^{we} you ^{we} revere and love Him? If ^{we} you ^{we} do, ^{we} you have within ^{we} you the mightiest motive power to fashion ^{we} your conduct upon His pattern. And here let it be said that a special responsibility attaches to us who are called by His name. The observing world rightly expects us to imitate in outward behaviour the example of the Master, and God Himself will require of us that we should have tried to follow in the footsteps of His Son.

Consider for the moment the two great qualities of justice and courage, regarding them as instances of many other Christian virtues.

JUSTICE.

The justice of Jesus is universally acknowledged. No impartial student of His conduct can fail to

observe that He was scrupulously fair to all who came within the scope of His dealings. The Christian is pledged to the same ideal, for he is not a mere "man of the world," concerned only with what he can get; he is by solemn initiation in Baptism and by his own avowal a citizen of another world—of that kingdom of qualities which Jesus Christ revealed alike in His teaching and actions. As disciples of His we are called to be conscientious and scrupulous in our dealings one with another; to treat others with that fairness that we desire for ourselves. Rather than take undue advantage, and appropriate what morally as well as legally belongs to others, we must be prepared to make sacrifice, whether we are playing a game or driving a bargain. If this be true where material things are concerned, there is a still stronger case for justice where spiritual qualities are the issue. It is an essential part of Christian morality that we should be as fair as we can in our estimate of other people's character. We do our neighbour a grave wrong in filching his money; we do him a graver wrong in robbing him of a moral quality. After all, a person's most precious possession is his character. We know so little of one another's circumstances and motives that we ought to be very cautious and scrupulous in forming our judgments. ~~Jesus showed~~ perfect appreciation of all this when he said, "Judge not, that ye be not judged . . . why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest ~~not the beam that is in thine own eye.~~" It is the mark of a Christian that he tries to be fair to all, and to give every man his due. J

Another quality profoundly affecting our daily conduct is courage. Human life is beset with vicissitudes. Jesus frankly took cognisance of them, and at no time promised that even the most devoted disciple could hope for immunity. Was not His own life laden with disappointment and struggle and failure? Yet He kept His head erect, and His heart strong. ~~In every stress He was steadfast and full of fortitude.~~ So He conquered every hindrance. For sheer love of Him and His character we shall emulate His example, and cultivate the same divine quality of courage. This He will enable us to do. The promise of His presence and power is sure of fulfilment if only we trust Him. It is of the very essence of the Christian character that we face difficulties without flinching, knowing that "they that be with us are more than they that be with them." Do not dwell upon and succumb to disappointments; avoid as a pestilence the harbouring of grievances. Look up in faith to the ever-conquering Jesus and believe He will win His triumphs over again in you. ~~So will you be~~ saved from sinking into despair in the battle of life; so will the grace of courage adorn your conduct and make you master of your circumstances. It is our conduct in adverse conditions that manifests most plainly our real worth. "'Tisn't life that matters! 'tis the courage you bring to it," says Hugh Walpole's rugged philosopher in *Fortitude*. That is profoundly true. The inward quality of

courage, by the grace of God, will always conquer outward circumstances.]

INFLUENCE OF CONDUCT.

The obviousness of conduct naturally tends to make its influence very considerable. [Men may veil their inward character with some success ; but their actions must soon be common knowledge. That is why outward behaviour tells so heavily for good or ill ; it is plain, immediate, and far-reaching. Through conduct we are constantly casting our shadows upon those who come within our sphere. And who can tell what share our conduct has in the making and unmaking of those around us ! ~~The sixth report of the World Call records that a~~ Christian missionary in Central Europe working among Jews baptised 1500 converts. He asked each one what had especially attracted him to the Christian religion, and the answer of all except two was, "the conduct of Christian people." Personal kindness, strict integrity, unfailing courage, and such-like moral qualities, ~~had~~ ^{have} left their impress upon ~~them~~ ^{others} and draw them to the same ideal Source. Here, too, in England it is true that we win or estrange men more by conduct than by preaching or arguing. We are daily moving among men and women who estimate not only us but our religion, too, by what they see of our conduct. It is therefore in our power to influence them for good and to lead them in the right way. This is especially true of our relationship to the young.]

Pray God, then, that so far from causing anyone to stumble, ^{but} ~~you~~ may by the goodness and uprightness of your conduct be a help and a blessing to those upon whom ~~your~~ shadow falls as ^{but} ~~you~~ journey through life. "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

XII.

SHARING THE CROSS.

"Then said Jesus unto His disciples, If any man will come after me let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me."—St. Matthew xvi. 24.

WE are keeping before us all the time the fact that in the realm of practice the Christian's chief concern is to fashion his character after that of his Master, Jesus Christ. It is a wide and comprehensive purpose, involving the full range of human life. But Jesus singles out and especially mentions here one respect in which His example is to be followed: the disciple must deny himself, and take up his cross with courage.

THE CROSS OF JESUS.

"Follow Me." Although Jesus had done no sin He suffered in mind and body more than it is possible for us to imagine, for the higher the nature the greater must be the capacity both to enjoy and to suffer. He had come into this world to proclaim the good news that God's love for men is infinite, and that there is therefore pardon and hope for all who will turn to Him in faith. That is the heart of the Gospel. Around this central truth He gave us the purest and loftiest teaching the world has ever known. Imagine then, His

disappointment that all He came to give was rejected by the very people to whom it was first offered. The repeated refusal of His Gospel caused Him mental agony, and drew tears from His pleading eyes. He suffered, too, in body. Jews and Romans handled Him roughly ; they stoned and scourged, and finally crucified Him. These afflictions were not sought or courted ; they came His way as He pursued His purpose. He had a perfectly clear vision of His mission ; no antagonism or hardship could deflect Him from fulfilling it. He pressed forward persistently with His appointed work and teaching, prepared to pay the price and to carry every cross that was incidental to the course He had chosen. Wave upon wave lashed against Him, but the Rock of Ages could not be shattered or even shaken. He was heroic and steadfast to the last, and in the end could triumphantly declare, " It is finished." From the height of that achievement He looks down on you and me, and tells us in effect that this is the only way to win through and bring our personalities to the fulness of their powers. " Follow Me."

HUMAN SUFFERINGS.

It is common knowledge that if we are loyal to the teaching and example of Jesus Christ and uphold His principles, we, too, must suffer. And for precisely the same reason that He suffered. It was the blindness and evil-mindedness of men that caused them to reject and persecute Him. The world was not ready to range itself on His side. It is not yet ready ; therefore they who are called

by His name and identify themselves with Him must be ready to share His sufferings. Christianity is, I think, gaining favour in the world in general, but it is not yet in such favour that its devotees are exempt from suffering in its service. Honesty is not yet the best policy ; we hope it may be so some day for the world's own sake. Meanwhile a man of Christian integrity may be called to deny himself and sustain material loss ; a youth in a workshop is occasionally ridiculed for his scrupulous fidelity to moral principles, and every conscientious Christian is required to carry a cross from time to time in consequence of his adherence to the teaching and example of his Master. We must be willing to pay the price, and we shall be if we are in any true sense disciples of Jesus Christ. There is another category of sufferings in the bringing of which upon ourselves we may have no direct part, such as bereavement, sickness, sorrow, and pain. Such afflictions fall to all appearance with little or no discrimination. The most staunch and devoted Christian is not immune. They are to be resisted and modified so far as possible, but in the degree that such a cross is laid upon us it is to be accepted and carried with fortitude. Taken in the spirit of the Master, it will help to purify and elevate our personal character. Since we are Christians, and not pagan stoics, our true part is not merely to bear the cross, but to bring it into subjection to a higher purpose, to use it as an instrument, to make it minister to the cleansing and sanctifying of the inward self. If you read the story of those in the past who have displayed great qualities of

character, you will find that they were not men and women whose paths were easy and convenient ; on the contrary, the very magnitude of their trials and obstacles was made the means of contributing to their development and attainments. Adversity rightly used has helped and will again help many a one to build up in himself the Christian graces of patience, courage, sympathy, and power.

There is, again, the cross of what may be described as sympathetic suffering, *i.e.*, a deliberate sharing in the grief of others. It cannot be doubted that this is a Christian duty, for the fellowship of mankind is ingrained in the Christian faith. As followers of Christ we are to enter into the afflictions of our brother men. It must be tempting to those whose lot in life is to all appearance smooth and easy to turn a blind eye to those less fortunate than themselves ; the well-to-do to forget the poor, the healthy to hold aloof from the sick, the successful to ignore the failures. But such conduct is unworthy of any one, and most of all, unworthy of a Christian. It is the negation of one of the great qualities of Christ. We are called as His disciples to suffer with others, to help and relieve, and to bring a gleam of sunshine into shadowed lives. So, in divers ways, it is our lot to suffer in this world. Disappointments and losses and calamities come upon us and upon our neighbours in one form or another. We cannot avoid them ; we cannot explain them in detail ; and yet we know that by the grace of God we can make of them stepping stones to ascend a little higher in the moral and spiritual scale.

HOW TO SUFFER.

This brings us to consider how to suffer. Our great example is Jesus Christ. I sometimes think, especially when in contact with people overwhelmed by some calamity, that we have dwelt too much on the idea that He suffered instead of us, and too little on the fact that He suffered in order to show us the right way to suffer. The Collect for Palm Sunday helps to correct this tendency, for there we first acknowledge that one great purpose of His Incarnation and Passion was to set an example of humility and patience, and then pray for grace to follow His example. Let us learn of Him, study His attitude and demeanour in all His trials, and strive to imitate Him.

It is not so much in fair as in foul weather that character is revealed. The ship is tested in the storm; the car upon a steep hill; the soldier in battle. If in the shadow of affliction you merely rebel and curse your fate and hate life; or as is the way of some you merely pity yourself and nurse a grievance, you know in your heart of hearts that you are wrong. You know, because deep down in yourself you have an ideal, and that ideal is the blessed Saviour enduring with patience and courage and perfect mastery every wave that beat against Him. We know people who have followed that example, who have faced trouble undaunted, and so far from being embittered or battered are sweetened and ennobled by their experience. They evoke at once our admiration. Whatever shallow observers say to the contrary, we are certain that suffering,

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rightly used, may help to cultivate in us the Christian graces of prayer, humility, sympathy, and courage.

Then welcome each rebuff
That turns earth's smoothness rough,
Each sting that bids nor sit nor stand but go !
Be our joys three parts pain !
Strive, and hold cheap the strain ;
Learn, nor account the pang ; dare, never grudge
the throe !*

TRIUMPHANT SUFFERING.

The battle is lost or won in the quietness of your own soul. Either you master and utilise your afflictions, or they master and enthrall you. That is settled in the silence of each man's heart. Where there is suffering, there ought to be some reticence too. Fuss and rattle are not conducive to the right handling of such conditions. There is a temperamental sense in which every man must be the centre of his own gravity. Assuming that he gains dominion over adversity there at the very seat of his personality, he attains real joy and happiness. For true happiness does not consist in the absence of struggle and sacrifice, nor yet in cushioned and coddled lives ; your life would be dull and drab if you had nothing hard to do ; your character would be flabby and sinewless if you heard no call to endure. The fact of struggle and the taste of triumph bring into the lives of men interest and enterprise and the thrill of romance.

* Robert Browning in *Rabbi Ben Ezra*.

It is no figment of fancy to say that the cross is now the crown. Through Christian endurance we do attain happiness and peace which the material world can neither give us nor take from us.

“If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me.” That is the call and challenge of Jesus to everyone of us, and we shall never do anything so wholesome for ourselves or for the world in general as try to respond to it. It is in bearing our sorrows and doing our work with patience and courage that we best develop our own personalities and do our part in promoting the Kingdom of God. Let me conclude with the clarion call of Canon Streeter in *Reality*—

“If the Kingdom of God is to be realised on earth, its soldiers need a rallying standard—and one with inspiration not limited by time or place. For this nation or for that, in one age or in another, an eagle, a flag, or a battle-song has had the magic to make men more than men; ask we a standard potent for every race and in every age? That standard is the Cross of Jesus; its legend, Follow Me.”

XIII.

CHRISTIAN CHILDHOOD.*

“And the child grew and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him.”
—St Luke ii. 40.

WE have here a summary of the childhood of Jesus. Very few details of that early period are recorded. Some of them we can imagine, and some we can certainly supply from our knowledge of Him in later life. For example, a close study of the parables would reveal a good deal of what Jesus must have observed when a boy at Nazareth. But what I particularly ask you to consider now is the share that His parents must have taken in the training and development of the child. We are encouraged by all competent students of theology in these days to regard the early years of Jesus in Nazareth as those of a normal child. He chose to live under ordinary human conditions. Therefore His parents must have had a great deal to do with His upbringing; and it is right to recognise what care they must have exercised, what wisdom they must have shown, what Godly influence they must have had upon a lad of whom it is said that He “grew and waxed

* Preached to Women.

strong, becoming full of wisdom : and the grace of God was upon Him."

HEALTH AND WORK.

The Child was physically well nurtured: He "grew and waxed strong." This healthy start proved to be a permanent blessing. We never hear of Jesus being ill. Tired He felt on occasions, under the strain of work and hostility; but He appears never to have suffered from sickness or disease. That is surely God's will for every child. We know that Jesus in His public ministry made war on all manner of physical afflictions, and that He bade His disciples do likewise. The body is a precious and noble instrument, to be nourished and protected. "Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost who is in you. . . . Therefore glorify God in your body." There are welcome signs just now that this truth is more generally appreciated than it was in the last century, and in consequence greater efforts are made to promote good health. Religion and science, backed by public authorities, are actively employed in counter-acting disease and improving physical conditions. The movement has come none too soon, for it is reported that last year (1929) no fewer than sixty-one per cent. of the recruits who offered themselves for enlistment in the British Army had to be rejected on grounds of physical defects. With the greater vigilance that is now exercised we may hope that nothing so pathetic or derogatory to our nation will be reported in the years to come. But let it never

be forgotten that it is largely in the power of parents to help or hinder this expected improvement. If they have a proper understanding of their obligations as Christians they will exercise sense and discipline in caring for their children's bodily health.

Like a healthy boy, Jesus had ample work to do. He would be apprenticed to Joseph as a carpenter. It seems probable that Joseph died while Jesus was still but a very young man. Upon Jesus therefore would fall the responsibility of maintaining His widowed mother; He would work steadily and intelligently in the shop adjoining the kitchen to keep the home in comfort. The subsequent relationship of Jesus and His mother as revealed in the Gospels shows plainly enough that this was an obligation which he filled with perfect satisfaction. They are seen as tender and loyal friends at the end of His days on earth.

It is well for parents to put their children in the way of work of one kind or another so that they may come to regard it as a normal and healthy part of human life. Some of us make the grave mistake of withholding from children as long as it is at all possible all idea of work; and when at last it has to be mooted, it is represented as something entirely irksome—an extra duty, imposed by a somewhat harsh Providence. If children get this idea of work, it may prejudice them against it all through life. It is our Christian duty to accustom our children to work, and to encourage them to take a real interest and delight in it, whether it be humble or exalted, manual or intellectual. It is work we have learnt to love that we shall do best. "Honour

the work," cried Thring of Uppingham, "and the work will honour you."

RELIGION AND THE CHILD.

It is worth noting how His parents directed Jesus strictly in the traditional teaching of Judaism. The child was brought up in full conformity with the Jewish faith and its outward observances. He was circumcised and named when He was a week old; presented in the temple to be "redeemed" as a first-born when He was a month old; and taken to Jerusalem to the Feast of the Passover for the first time at the age of twelve, when he would be admitted into a more advanced membership of the Jewish Church and be recognised as a "son of the Law." The parents at each of these stages accepted the rule and guidance of the Church and gave the child full advantage of its ministry. Are English parents to-day as ready to bestow similar privileges upon their children? We thankfully acknowledge that very many do bring their children to be baptized. At the conclusion of that beautiful Service the god-parents are admonished to take care that "this child be brought to the bishop to be confirmed by him so soon as he can say the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments . . . and be further instructed in the Church Catechism set forth for that purpose." Failing the god-parents, the parents themselves ought to attend to this important step in the religious upbringing of the child. But alas! many do not. A mother, unknown to me, evidently impressed by the solemnity

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of the occasion, said in my hearing just after a Confirmation Service, "I brought my girl; if I had thought of it I would have brought my boy as well." Another woman recently remarked in reference to her daughter, "I didn't happen to hear that any of her friends were attending the class, so I didn't bother." How many have regretted in after life that they did not bring their children more into contact with religious ministrations in the early days! As Christian fathers and mothers it is our privilege and duty to do this for our children. God wants them in conscious fellowship with Himself as they grow up, and it is wholly for their good that like the boy Jesus they should be brought into that fellowship. I am not suggesting that we should unduly press and dragoon our children into religion. In a normal case that would not be necessary in the years that we have now in mind, for a child does naturally take kindly to the Christian Faith where it is intelligently presented. What I would urge upon you is not to shirk your share in the matter. Do not leave all to the teachers in Sunday or day Schools. The complaint is frequent nowadays that religious education is not supported as it ought to be in the home. It would be well for parents to go on learning themselves through reading the Bible and sound religious books so as to be sufficiently interested to talk to their children about such matters, and to talk intelligently. Then the children would be guided by them in such a way that they would not find later in life that they had been misinformed on important subjects. Continue to educate yourselves, and you will be able and

desirous to educate your children. You can, in their early years, enlighten their minds with beautiful truths from the Bible and the Church. But the opportunity is passing, and you do well to make the best and utmost use of it.

WISDOM.

It is recorded that Jesus, brought up by His parents as a loyal Jew, steadily increased in knowledge and understanding. The tense is imperfect. He gradually became full of wisdom. There were not many books to read in those days, but He was evidently familiar with the Old Testament. The learned Rabbis in the Temple were delighted with the lad's intelligence. His parents had evidently encouraged Him to read and inquire and discover for Himself. Apart from actual teaching, what priceless service parents can render by encouraging in their children a love of knowledge. So much is done nowadays by public authorities to promote education that parents are inclined to leave the whole matter in the hands of the State. It would be an enormous help if more were done in the home to create an atmosphere favourable to learning, so that a boy's or a girl's life would be less divided and self-contradictory. It is pathetic to see them learn in school and unlearn at home. I would appeal to parents to try and preserve a unity of purpose between two such noble institutions. Jesus, like most Jewish boys, developed early. Already, at the age of twelve, He displayed a certain mentality of His own, distinct even from that of His mother.

“Why is it that ye are seeking Me. Did ye not know that I must be in My Father’s house?” Some parents find it hard to acknowledge and accept the native individuality of the child. And yet it is useless to expect him or her to be exactly like ourselves. We must make allowance for the separate growth and development of each one’s personality. Dealing with children is a delicate task. Science as well as history is teaching us to-day that it is wrong to assume that we have quite a clean slate on which we may write anything that we will. Every child has its own tendencies—its own temperament, mentality, and ability. We may modify them, but we cannot radically change the personality. Nor is it desirable that we should. Our true part is to study the child, and adapt our methods of dealing with him to his special needs. We must not attempt to hammer him into a certain mould, or prescribe for him his future vocation. Give him light and direction in things fundamental; teach him the supremacy of goodness, truth, and beauty, as it is revealed in the character of Jesus Christ; but let him develop in his own way and preserve his own individuality.

There is one very potent but indirect method of refining and ennobling children, and that is surrounding them so far as we can with things and ideas that are beautiful. Remove, if possible, everything that is ugly and degrading from their environment. Make the home and the school and their habits of life pleasant to behold. Encourage them to admire and love objects of beauty in the world of nature. All this has an influence that is deep and

lasting upon the receptive mind of the child. So shall we help our children to grow in all that is good, and to acquire increasingly the grace of divine wisdom.

THE BLESSING OF GOD.

We read that the grace of God was upon the child Jesus, and that He was in favour with God and man. This means that He was a very happy boy in Himself, and brought happiness to others. He was like a gleam of sunshine, illuminating with a pleasant effect every place and person that received Him. His character was such that He had an inward peace, and a wholesome effect upon all who had to do with Him. His parents must have contributed largely to the building-up of this radiant state. Their example must have been of the best and purest. For it belongs to the very order of nature that, more than any advice, rebuke or penalty, it is our personal character that leaves the most indelible impression upon those who are growing up under our shadow. What we are at heart and in the last resort sinks silently into the child and is unconsciously assimilated by him. We are inevitably contributing by the quiet witness of example to the character of our young ones; and as they grow into manhood and womanhood they will reveal, perhaps, when we have long left this life, this and that trait, the seed of which was planted by our unconscious influence. Let us strive to make our inward character such that its effect upon them may be a token of nothing less happy and good than the blessing of God.

XIV, THE LIFE OF SERVICE.

"I am in the midst of you as He that serveth."—
St. Luke xxii. 27.

ALL who know anything of the life of Jesus Christ on this earth agree that it was a life of devoted service to God and man. It is equally clear that He urged His followers to be likewise serviceable in their day and generation. Let us understand what Christian service means. It means much more than a general amiability, or occasional subscription to deserving objects. It goes down to the root of character and involves our motives and the springs of life. For example, one thing indispensable to Christian service is

HUMILITY.

By this we do not mean a cringing attitude to those in possession of wealth or power, nor yet that self-depreciation by which men feign to disown their natural gifts and capacities. Jesus was utterly free from any such demeaning practices, and we may well be thankful that they are rarely to be seen in our own day. Uriah Heap belongs to a type from which as a nation we have largely and happily liberated ourselves.

Consider now one or two ways in which Jesus in His active ministry showed the grace of humility. First, by associating with all sorts of people on perfectly friendly and natural terms. How varied they were ! Among them we see ecclesiastical leaders like Nicodemus and Jairus ; men in authority like the Centurion ; rich men like Zaccheus ; a woman of bad reputation ; a despised publican like Matthew ; a red-hot nationalist like Simon Zelotes. No social or political or religious barrier could block the way of fellowship. He mingled with all sorts and conditions of people on the ground of their common humanity and the value of every soul in the sight of God. So completely human and humble was He that no kind of man, woman, or child could be outside His interest and goodwill. Secondly, we note that Jesus used His powers, never for His own glory, but always for the benefit of others. He refused to turn stones into bread for Himself, but He multiplied loaves to feed a famishing crowd. That is the way of humility. If the service we render is to be Christian in spirit, we must put self in the background, and personal ambition nowhere. Our one desire must be to promote the glory of God and to help our fellowmen. Where these motives are given free course, and service is done in a humble spirit, there is a true approach to the beautiful example of our blessed Lord, and benevolent activities are redeemed from the fuss and assertiveness which sometimes spoil them. Humility helps more than is apparent to make personal kindness acceptable and effectual, for it creates the atmosphere which alone can make them so.

WORK.

Jesus was indefatigable in the rendering of service. He was constantly at work. "We must work the works of Him that sent Me while it is day: the night cometh when no man can work." He felt an urge from God impelling Him from one activity to another—preaching the Word, healing the sick, forgiving the sinful, comforting the sorrowful, enlightening the ignorant. Idleness was utterly foreign to Him. There is abroad to-day among many thoughtful observers a suspicion that we British people are less industrious than we used to be. Whether we actually are so or not is a difficult question to answer accurately. Perhaps we are more restless and less useful. Anyway, the fact that many have the impression that there is a slackening of serious effort on our part ought to put us on our guard. There is a snare alike in idleness and in frivolity. Whether the flaw be a passive self-indulgence or an inordinate love of pleasure, it is devastating to the soul. We cannot develop our personalities or help forward the progress of the world if we shirk the discipline of sustained and honest work. Certainly no Christian worthy of the name will seek to reduce his quota of labour to the minimum. A liberal output of work in one form or another is both wholesome for ourselves and beneficial to the community.

But I want to plead more particularly for a generous offering of voluntary service. England has a fine tradition in this respect. Men and women have been forthcoming in successive ages to promote

both public and private service without pay or desire of recognition. The opportunities were never greater than they are to-day. There are organisations for guiding and helping the young which are in urgent need of being manned by public-spirited and competent people. Boys and girls at a critical period of life could be directed into paths of useful citizenship with the aid of responsible leaders willing to devote to them an evening or two a week. Civic life and philanthropic institutions are opening doors for many who have a sense of duty to their generation. The Church, both here at home and overseas, is persistently calling for more offers of personal service to spread the knowledge of God and of the principles of His Kingdom. In school and class and meeting, as well as in many a home, what noble things could be done, what achievements there might not be, if more of those well able to assist would only come forward and help! Let every Christian worshipper especially consider that the Services we attend in Church are strangely incomplete unless there is also in our personal life active service to our fellowmen.

THE JOY OF SERVICE.

It would be affectation and misleading to represent that such service is wholly easy. There is, first, a certain diffidence to overcome. Many good people are genuinely so distrustful of themselves as to shrink from the idea of being helpful to others. But it is often discovered that when the initial obstacles are overcome, and modesty has given way

to a little adventure, they are as capable as they need be for the task in hand. Encouraged by others at the start they often turn out to be more successful than they had dared to hope. Voluntary work of this kind also involves self-denial, for it will often clash with less exacting alternatives. Well, we showed in the War that we are capable of immeasurable sacrifice. There was then a thrill about doing unpleasant and even gruesome things which impelled us to adventure without caring what the cost. We were out for service. But how now? Where is the old romance? In reality it is now precisely where it has always been. It is inherent in the act of giving oneself in a great and good cause. If you take up earnestly and wholeheartedly some definite branch of work that is helpful to the community, you will find that it will interest and grip you increasingly. Your thoughts will go outwards and delight in wholesome activities. Instead of moping upon your own small affairs or frittering away your time and talents upon useless and maybe injurious objects, you will find romance and inspiration in the enterprise of personal service. Is not that the general witness? Think of the men and women who in ages past found an outlet for their finest energies, not in amassing things for themselves, but in giving to others. It is they, and not the self-centred, who had the fullest taste of the glow and the glory of life; it is they who came nearest the attainment of perfect joy and satisfaction. Let me quote to you from the *Times* a recent account of one who found in personal service the chief attraction of life:—**T**emple Gairdner, spent

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his life as a missionary to Moslems, with Cairo as its centre. He chose his career with full awareness of the difficulties awaiting him. He saw in Islam the great challenge to Christianity, a deliberate rejection of its spiritual values. He knew that in setting himself to meet that challenge he was turning his back on worldly success and on achievements that might have brought him fame. But, like others in history, he had come under the spell of the person of Christ. It became his one ambition to serve worthily the Leader who had won his heart. Religion for him meant escape from all that was mean, narrow, impure, and self-seeking, and a continuous striving after what was high and heroic. ~~He was a knightly figure.~~ In personal devotion to his Master and personal service to the most needy of men, Temple Gairdner found ample reward for any sacrifice that he made. God has so ordered the world that they who do His will shall have ineffable joy within. Christian service, *i.e.*, service done in a good cause and in the right spirit, drives away dullness and worry, protects men against many onslaughts of Satan, and brings inward delight and happiness. The right kind of giver is invariably a cheerful giver, and has in his heart something of the glamour of heaven and the song of serving angels.

XV.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHARACTER.*

"Jesus looked upon him, and said, Thou art Simon the son of John: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, Rock."—St. John i. 42.

THIS was a great landmark in Simon Peter's life. His brother Andrew had brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked into his face with affection and understanding, and summed up at once the kind of man he was, and what could be made of him. "Thou art Simon . . . thou shall be called Cephas."

SELF RESPECT.

Let us, too, look at Simon in his natural state—a fisherman, living in the fishing village of Bethsaida, on the north-east coast of the sea of Galilee. He is a big, rugged man, plain-spoken, impetuous, and of a hasty temper, apt to say and do the wrong things, but always ready to admit his mistakes, and generous in his judgment of others. We would describe him to-day as a very good sort. Many of these characteristics he had inherited from his parents. Jesus seems to acknowledge that as a fact when he addresses him—"Simon, son of John." Not only in physical form and features, but also in

*Preached to young people.

temperament and mental qualities he would resemble his father and mother.

So we all have our individual characteristics. Some of them have been passed on to us from our homes and our nationality, others seem to have grown spontaneously within ourselves. But, however things have come about, here we are, each one a distinct personality, possessing a combination of characteristics that mark us off from the rest of mankind. There is no one else in the world quite like you. And mark this, the Christian religion does not require you to obliterate that individuality of yours and become something different. I suspect many young people shrink from religion because they imagine that its acceptance must involve the negation of their own nature. Nothing of the kind. God wants you to be natural, *i.e.*, to be true to yourself. Look at it in this way—you are very precious in the sight of your parents; they love you for what you are. If you were taken from them and someone else was given them in your place, that someone else would not be at all the same joy to them. So God has a special place in His heart for you, and despite all your faults, you are of infinite value in His sight. Be sure therefore that God wants you for your own sake, just as you are. He has regard for your special and unique individuality. Simon never ceased to be Simon. So much, I think, is implied by the fact that even after the Resurrection Jesus addressed him, "Simon, son of John, lovest thou Me?" All that happened was that through developing his character under the influence of his Master he became worthy of

an additional name—"thou shall be called Rock." The groundwork of his personality was always the same, and had a special value of its own. So has yours. Learn to respect yourself, soul and body; avoid the enervating habit of merely imitating others; and protect yourself as holy ground against the pollution that defiles fair lives. There is a niche in the universe which God wants you to fill because you are what you are; keep yourself in readiness for that, and thus make your contribution to the fulfilment of the Divine purpose.

THE CALL OF CHRIST.

What influenced Simon Peter to turn his thoughts and energies to the highest end and dedicate himself to God was the call of Jesus Christ. When he saw and heard Jesus calling him he could not say No. What he did say was, "I am only a poor fisherman, but since You want me I am at Your service." He might have refused. Let us imagine for a moment that he did so, and went back to his fishing in Bethsaida. Three years later we may picture him in Jerusalem at the Feast of Pentecost. The city is all astir. There are men declaring in public places that Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified has risen from the dead, that from Heaven His dwelling-place He is a redeeming power upon earth, and that beyond the shadow of death there is a life eternal and happy for those who accept and live out His Gospel. Simon stands in a crowd, and hearing all this from the lips of impassioned preachers he reflects, "I might have been one of

them. This Jesus they are talking about gave me the chance three years ago, but I refused. I went to my fishing and dull routine. I have earned my bread, but I have not got that joyous persuasion of the Truth that these fellows have, and which lifts a man to a higher level than this perishing earth." That, I think, is what would pass through the mind of Simon Peter. That is the kind of reflection that many have later in life who have turned a deaf ear to the call of Christ in youth. I have heard more than one say something like this: "I had my chance; my mother taught me to pray; I went to Sunday School; I was confirmed after careful preparation; but later on I got slack about such things, neglected church, dropped my prayers, and just went the way of the world with a lot of other fellows." Yes, the call of Christ has often failed of response. But it comes again. This is still the day of salvation. Jesus looks into your face as He did into Simon Peter's, and says, "I know you through and through, and for your own sake, and the world's sake, and God's sake, I want you for my disciple and witness."

DEVELOPMENT.

I think Simon must have been not a little moved to respond to Jesus by the heartening prophecy: Thou shalt be called a Rock. He was given a glimpse of what he would become through following the Master. We observed at the outset that he was impetuous and unstable; but under the guidance of Jesus and by the power of the Holy Spirit, this

very impetuosity would make him adventurous for the Kingdom of God, and he would grow strong and steadfast. He was promised no outward reward, no worldly success ; but he would be a better man ; his weaknesses would be overcome, and his character would develop. It is not external praise, but inward praiseworthiness that is held out for attainment in the Christian Religion. Young people naturally have their ambitions ; they want to get on in life and improve their material position ; but infinitely more important is it that they should cherish ideals. You may be ambitious and attain success in the worldly sense, and yet all the time have a corrupt heart and a perverted mind. There is something immeasurably more precious than efficiency and achievement in material affairs, and that is the possession of a moral conscience that will spurn what is base, and choose the good and the true and the pure. Jesus sets before you in example and teaching the highest ideal of life, and pleads your acceptance of the light He reveals.

You are not left unaided in the effort. God in His providential love has ordained and preserved the ministry of the Church to help and direct you on your way. It is your wisdom as well as your virtue to make full use of that ministry. Make it your habit to associate with those who share your devotion to God and your acceptance of the Christian ideals. There is help in fellowship. Follow the message of the Church week by week through its appointed readings from the Bible and the teaching of its ministries. Faithfully obey the Lord's command to feed your soul upon the gift

of Himself in blessed sacrament ; and fortify and deepen all this ministry by your own daily prayers and meditations. By these and other ways that will make themselves manifest you will keep in close touch with the best and truest things in life, the things of God, and will build up in yourself that most precious of all possessions—the Christian character.

You see, then, that my message to you is two-fold. Let me sum it up in a few concluding words. First, each one of you—just as you are—is of infinite value in the sight of God. Respect yourself, body and soul, and preserve inviolate the sovereignty of your own personality.

Secondly, reflect how incalculably more important are the moral qualities manifested in Jesus Christ than all other considerations ; make Him your Hero and Ideal, and use faithfully the ministry of His Church that will help you to advance towards the standard that He ever holds up to you.

XVI.

THE SPIRIT OF POWER.

"Ye shall receive power when the Holy Ghost is come upon you."—Acts i. 8.

It was an anxious moment. Jesus was about to withdraw His bodily presence from His friends and followers. He had taken great pains to prepare them for the ordeal. "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you." The hour of parting had come at last. He must send them forth to bear witness to all that He had taught them. Their task would be twofold: To keep themselves unspotted from the world, and to proclaim the Gospel of salvation. So there devolved upon them a tremendous responsibility from which they might well shrink. Jesus understood their misgiving, and reassured them with the promise, "*Ye shall receive power when the Holy Ghost is come upon you.*"

THE EARLY CHRISTIANS.

They took Him at His word. After His departure they waited and prayed with earnest expectation, and within a few days they had the strange and startling experience of receiving the promised gift. The Holy Spirit came upon them and endowed them with power such as they had never known before. They were as new men, really and fully

converted. No doubt or fear any longer clouded their horizon; no hindrance could impede their progress. Confident of their message and daring in action they went forward with fresh courage and great power. They bore witness to their Master by displaying His spirit and proclaiming His message wherever they went. Their outward works were also in direct succession to His own; they healed the sick and brought light and hope to those in distress. The Holy Spirit who had come into them from above had brought the resources of Heaven into their possession. They succeeded in their mission beyond all natural expectation; they prevailed by virtue of the Spirit who now dwelt within them. Here was God in action in the world of men. Recalling the history of those early days, Professor Hadfield remarks that enhancement of power was then the normal experience of a Christian.* A Divine energy pervaded the believers and fired them with a force that was irresistible. That is the secret behind the converting sermons, the healing miracles, the rapid spread of the Gospel, the heroic deeds of saints and martyrs. Those early Christians opened their hearts to the Holy Spirit and He filled them with indefeasible power.

CHRISTIANS TO-DAY.

I think we must confess that it is in this respect, perhaps more than in any other, that we fall short

* See his Essay on "the Psychology of Power" in *The Spirit* (Macmillan).

of the standard attained by those early converts. In general, we have not to-day the passionate faith and conviction of power that they had. Many of us are too content to think of the Christian religion as something which is good and benevolent, but not an effective force. This is partly accounted for by the notion that God is very remote—a Being of unapproachable beauty and moral perfection in Heaven. So far as it goes that is a correct conception, and it has the wholesome effect of engendering reverence and humility in us. But we cannot be familiar with the teaching of Jesus Christ without being reminded of another aspect, for He taught explicitly that through the Holy Spirit God comes very near to us and deigns indeed to dwell within us. One of our greatest needs to-day is a conviction of the truth that God does transmit Himself into those who have faith to receive Him. If we had it, we should not be the timid and futile creatures we often prove ourselves to be. An utter persuasion that God is within us, that He chooses to operate through us, would give us a sense of power to which, alas! we are for the most part strangers. We should no longer be daunted by the tasks and the trials that lie before us. We should know of absolute certainty that nothing could defeat us. The assurance of St. Paul, "I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me," or of General Gordon when he said, "I am not afraid to go on this mission among treacherous Chinese, for God will go with me"—a like assurance would ring in our hearts and silence all fears. The

sovereignty of our sanctified personality would triumph in every emergency.

We seriously lack this robust faith to-day. I hazard the remark that seldom have the defects of fear and depression been so prevalent. One often meets or hears of people who are daunted and overwhelmed by circumstances or prospects which ought to be faced with fortitude and confidence. God knows there is some excuse for us, for the Great War was a nerve-racking furnace of anguish the like of which the world ought never to see again. What we specially need to cope with this mentality is a revival of belief in the presence and power of God. Let us go back to the first principles of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. God's will for the world is its goodness and happiness, and for every individual soul there is nothing He seeks but its welfare. Love is the very nature of His Being. He has, moreover, the power to give effect to His will—to make it operative and actual. It is His way to do this by coming into the minds and hearts of men, and here and now, in and through our own personalities, assert Himself and fulfil His purpose. Our part in the process is to have simple, child-like faith in all this. We should then be delivered from the haunting spectres of fear and feebleness; we should be calm and self-possessed, knowing that He who loves us and dwells within us is incomparably greater in power than any forces that are ranged against us. I have personal acquaintance with a few who have found salvation for soul and body in taking Jesus at His word, "Ye shall receive power when the Holy Ghost is come upon you."

RECEIVING THE SPIRIT.

Let me try and help you to come into possession of this precious gift. The first necessity is to make room for God in your heart. There may be some things already holding your affections, which are contrary to Him. If you are preoccupied with material concerns and filled with ambition for worldly position or wealth or pleasures, then you have the task of relegating these things to their proper place and dimensions. There must be a change of mind, a revision of values, and a redirection of the affections. You must make room in your heart for God as He is revealed in Jesus Christ, room for "the spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him." Everyday you will find little spaces of time in which to turn the thoughts to Him. You will dwell upon the beauty of His love and the greatness of His power; you will enjoy conscious fellowship with Him. "Ye know Him; for He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you." Believe that there is for you as for others a real fulfilment of the promise, "Lo, I am with you all the days, even unto the end of the ages." Many have been helped by fastening and dwelling upon some elementary truth expressed in a short and simple formula, like, "Jesus is with me and enables me." Here is a truth which keeps you in touch with Him from whom wisdom and strength will come.

God's revelation of Himself in the Bible is redolent with assurances of calmness and power. Listen to the Old Testament, "Say unto them of a fearful

heart, Be strong, fear not." "They that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength." "In quietness and confidence shall be your strength." Listen yet more to the New Testament. "Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me." "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." "My grace is sufficient for thee." So we learn from Holy Scripture as we also learn from experience that when we open our hearts to God and enthrone Him there, we are delivered from fear and fuss and futility, and are indeed filled with calm confidence and effective power. There is no limit to what can be achieved by the help of God. Do not be daunted by difficulties. "As thy day is, so shall thy strength be." The faithful Christian is capable of adaptation to the severest tests, and nothing need defeat him. This has been well illustrated by Sir Francis Younghusband in his stirring book, *The Epic of Mount Everest*. The expedition had failed, but, he adds, "it had made a discovery of outstanding importance for mankind generally. It had discovered that man acclimatises himself to the effects of the highest altitudes. If the spirit of man will drive him on to climbing the highest heights, he will find himself rising to the occasion; he will find both body and mind responding to the call of the spirit." The same is true of the Christian on his adventurous pilgrimage. Above us is the Supreme Personality in whom all love and power consist; we seek and find fellowship with Him; and, of course, as in human relations, the stronger impresses the weaker, and transmits something of His own abundance into us. Let us

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learn to have fellowship with Him more habitually and intensely, through meditation and prayer and worship, and whatsoever way there is that leads to Him. So shall we partake of His power and grow like Him in character. The promise stands good for you and me, and is a thousandfold confirmed in the experience of men, "Ye shall receive power when the Holy Ghost is come upon you."

XVII.

TRUE VALUES.*

"What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"—St. Mark viii. 36.

JESUS deals in this passage with a problem that is engaging the minds of many thoughtful people in our own day—the problem of values. He assumes that men are not fools, and that they reason and calculate. He assumes also that at heart they are good, that their instincts are sound, and that therefore it is the best that they really want. But what is the best? What constitutes real value? What shall a man seek when he wants profit? One thing is certain—he must choose. Not a day passes over any one of us but that we are confronted with alternatives; and if instead of taking blindly the line that is at the moment most pressed upon us we think and discriminate, we shall find that the alternatives vary enormously in real worth. Before adopting this or that attitude, or plunging into a train of actions, we ought to pause and reflect, and see whither it will lead us. At first, the trouble with ^{so many who} ~~more than half the men~~ that go wrong in life and lose their soul or character is not that they want to go wrong, but that they do not think

* Preached to men.

out the issue; it is not that they are wicked, but that they are foolish and shortsighted. So Jesus warns men to deliberate upon the various ways of life, to consider their respective merits, and to choose the right one. For what shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?

THE WORLD.

In the New Testament generally, and especially in Our Lord's discourses and the writings of St. Paul, the world means the material part of the universe—the things we see and handle. There is no authority for the notion that the world is essentially evil, and that it is a thing to avoid as much as possible. Bishop Westcott has pointed out that when the world is spoken of with disparagement in Holy Scripture, what is meant is not the whole material realm, but "society organised apart from God." Of all the authors in the New Testament St. John takes the least favourable view of the world, and even he does not represent it as inherently hostile to man. Jesus did not seek to take Himself or His followers out of the world; on the contrary, He lived in close touch with it, and bade His disciples spread abroad in it. They were to be no exclusive self-preserving community, like the Essenes of old, shrinking from the daily round of mundane affairs. It was their marching orders to mingle with all sorts of men in all conditions of life, and to proclaim the Gospel in the market-place as in the synagogue. So God wills us to live in the world, following the ordinary avocations of life,

frankly recognising the material part of the universe, and having much to do with the common things of life such as work and recreation and food and ~~raiment~~ and money. These things are in themselves harmless; they possess no moral character of their own; they become what we make them. The world in this sense is a mere instrument for human handling—the raw material entrusted to us to trade with wisely and profitably. In their desire to throw the onus of responsibility on something or someone other than themselves, people ask, What's wrong with the world? There is nothing wrong with the world; but much is wrong with the men who inhabit it.

We may go further and assert that the world is a *friendly* instrument, supplied by the wisdom of God to serve a good purpose. Nature will minister to our profit and delight if approached and treated with due regard; material things, like money or commodities, will minister to our comfort and joy; scientific discoveries will enhance our powers and promote our health and capacity; the material avocations we severally follow are our very opportunities to practise and develop in ourselves the Christian qualities. The early Christians were taught and did, in fact, believe, that all material things had come from God, and that the whole world ~~was~~ ~~salvable and useable, and could all~~ be consecrated to the service of God and man.

So the world is not to be treated with contempt as a thing despicable, nor is it to be dreaded and avoided as a thing evil and contaminating. We want a sufficiency of the things of this world for

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every man, woman, and child to live in comfort, free from grinding poverty and polluting dirt and fell disease. In the Christian view it is the purpose of the material resources of the universe to provide men with such decent conditions that they may have a reasonable chance to live a healthy and a joyous life. J

GAINING THE WORLD.

What Jesus warns us against is limiting the horizon of our vision to material things. "The essence of worldliness," says Dean Inge, "is to mistake means for ends." It is easy to drift into this mental state. A man of inordinate ambition with a business to build up or a position to attain is apt to be lop-sided and may relegate into the limbo of the things that do not matter every consideration that does not serve his immediate purpose. Imagine him resolved upon amassing a fortune. He gives himself soul and body to this single objective, abandons every principle and scruple, and has regard neither for God nor man. His advance is like that of a steam-roller, and he arrives at great wealth. "Verily, I say unto you, they have their reward." He has gained the world, but in the process the world has also gained him. He is wholly in the grip of materialism, a captive to things that are visible, tangible, perishable.

What we have observed about hoarding money is equally true about spending money. If you set your heart on purchasing mundane pleasures with every shilling that can be commanded for the pur-

pose, you are worshipping the world no less than the grasping miser. A vast number of people in every grade of society fritter away a large portion of their material resources on frivolities that do them far more harm than good. They incessantly pursue pleasures that provide the maximum of excitement and the minimum of satisfaction. All goes well and smoothly enough for a while, but sensual indulgences have no staying power—they end in disappointment and misery. There comes a time when a man long accustomed to them discovers their emptiness and weariness. There is tragic disillusionment, and you can sometimes see it in a man's face. He has had a surfeit of physical and superficial pleasures; he has gained the world, but is famishing for something else.

THE SOUL.

Why is this? Because man is more than the beast that perisheth. Man has a soul as well as a body. What does this mean? The word soul has had various shades of meaning. In the Bible generally it signifies that life which is embodied in man and distinguishes him from a plant or a horse. But in this passage of St. Mark's Gospel, as well as in a few other places in the New Testament, the emphasis is on the personality—the sphere of man's spiritual qualities, in contrast to the flesh. The Greek word might be more accurately translated "life." However difficult it may be to define this life—for it is a region in which words often fail—we cannot but be conscious of possessing it. We

know it by experience ; we feel and realise it. By virtue of it we are more immediately akin to God than any other creature, and that is why we cannot be satisfied with material things. The soul is always stretching out for the spiritual. " My soul is athirst for God, yea, even for the living God." It requires access to a world other than this visible one ; it craves to commune with a spiritual Being, and must be sustained by spiritual realities. Even men who have worldly work to do day by day, and follow their avocations in business or profession or manual labour know that there is this spiritual side to their nature. It is not the privilege of the mystic ; it is the inheritance of all men. It is ingrained in us by God, and enlarged by natural development ; it is part of our very being and constitution.

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting :
 The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star
 Hath had elsewhere its setting,
 And cometh from afar ;
 Not in entire forgetfulness,
 And not in utter nakedness,
 But trailing clouds of glory do we come
 From God, who is our home.*

This part of us, which is far and away the most important, aspires to moral and spiritual ideals, and impels us to cultivate those qualities which are replete in God and manifested in Jesus Christ. The highest is there, and the soul must have the highest. That is why we cannot be content with material possessions and achievements, however lavish and

* Wordsworth's *Ode on Immortality*.

resplendent. We aspire to develop the very qualities of God—the things of real and permanent value, summed up as Goodness, Truth, and Beauty. These are the ultimate values, the things that remain and cannot be shaken. When wealth and honours and worldly pleasures wither and shrivel at the touch of death, those spiritual qualities of the soul shine out most luminously, and gladden the heart of him who has them. They and they alone satisfy the condition of permanence which is inherent in the personality of man. It was this fact that inspired the challenge, "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

LOSING THE SOUL.

It is implied that the soul may diminish in power and capacity, until it has almost ceased to exist, and the implication is verified by observation and experience. For instance, that is what happens in the life of the sensualist. Imagine him at first in his teens, a youth of promise, of fine physique and friendly disposition. It is his habit, perhaps, to read novels whose atmosphere is not that of the bracing mountain or of the beautiful valley, but of hot-house. Inevitably the sordid scenes and happenings of these stories make an impression upon his mind, and he can hardly help fondling and re-enacting them in his secret thoughts. From thought to deed is a natural step, and once the bounds are broken there is every likelihood of a repetition. So begins the downward grade, and it goes from bad to worse, until the youth has sold

himself, soul and body, to utter debauchery. The devil's domination is almost complete. The youth now grown into manhood, has lost the power of control, and the strength of his soul is sapped by frequent and shameful falls. And there is something yet more tragic—his inward thoughts are wholly polluted. Society and books and events that are pure and lovely and of good report no longer appeal to him. He has lost inclination and capacity for the things of God. His personality is in ruins.

Losing the soul ! There is nothing so terrible and tragic in the whole range of human life. Yet it happens even in this enlightened age again and again. And it is brought about, not only by the passionate sins of the sensualist, but also by the worship of mammon, the curse of excessive drinking, and a host of similar evils. The cause of it all is the seeking of satisfaction in things of inadequate value. The material world has its proper place and function in the providence of God ; but it is intended to be subordinate to spiritual realities. The soul must dominate the body ; Christian truths must prevail over pleasing theories ; Christian principles must guide the activities of men.

It is infinitely more important for everyone of us to seek to do what is right and just and good than what is most immediately popular or self-gratifying. Do not be deceived by first appearances. The glamour that fascinates the eyes and stirs the senses often turns out to be worthless and even ruinous. Consider what constitutes true value, and realise that the most precious possessions are

those which pertain to a man's soul—the qualities at the heart of his personality. When a man is dead it is sometimes asked, What was he worth? He was worth precisely the value of his inward character. “For what shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?”

XVIII.

ENDURANCE AND DESTINY.

"Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."—Revelation ii. 10.

WE have lifted our eyes to the hills on which shines the moral splendour and Divine authority of Jesus Christ. It is a vision which cannot fail to stir in us longings and aspirations for higher spiritual attainments. When we have seen the strength and beauty of His character, we want to grow a little more like Him. It is all to the good that we should thus have our emotions awakened from time to time. Let none despise an occasional impulse. A stirring of the soul through some special effort like a Mission is not without intrinsic value; and its possibilities for good no man can judge. But let us now face up to the fact that the Christian character is not made in a moment; that it is a long and arduous process, involving the grace of perseverance and tenacity. That is the deep significance of the word "faithful" in the text. "Be thou trustworthy to the point of death." Jesus has made His appeal, and has evoked in you a genuine desire to respond. Let us assume so much. You have caught the vision; Will you be loyal to it in days to come?

THE TEMPTATION TO FLAG.

It would be foolish and misleading to represent that temptations to forsake the ideal which has won your affections will not be many and alluring. When the glamour that naturally accompanies a special call has passed into the common day and the freshness is faded, other voices will make themselves heard. The aggressive claims of the material world will assert themselves just when you may be getting a little tired of the discipline which the Christian character involves. To-day we will assume that you are on the crest of a spiritual wave, but in humdrum days to come, when the waters are smooth and there is lack of momentum and enthusiasm, you will be tempted to wonder whether it is worth while to go on. When life in the Church has settled down to the inevitable routine, and there is little stirring, and things are normal and prosaic, it will be easy to drop a scruple here and there, to relax the forward movement and lower the standard.

There is a picturesque description in Isaiah's prophecy which tells us that they whose strength is renewed, as ours is at special seasons, "shall mount up with wings as eagles, shall run and not be weary, shall walk and not faint." Fly—run—walk ! The order, as George Adam Smith remarks in his eloquent commentary, is the very reverse of what hopeful people might expect. We like to imagine ourselves accelerating, walking—running—flying. But the prophet says No. You begin with what is easiest—the stirring of emotions under the spell of some moving appeal. Inspired song on prophecy may have lifted you on its outstretched

pinions and placed you on the heights where aspirations almost run riot. That is a perfectly legitimate function of the ministry, and a perfectly natural response on your part. But it does not settle everything. There remains the more difficult task of passing from the vision to the doing, from the dream to the practical. It was a prophecy that was subsequently justified in the history of Israel. Their approaching departure from Babylon was marked, as any lover of his country can understand, by exaltation and songs of praise. They were drunk with the vision of old Zion's gates opening wide to welcome them, and of the Holy City radiant again in the world as the home of true religion. And then followed—What? Five and a half centuries devoid of any great achievement. The people were scattered in small groups, and lived largely on the sufferance of Gentiles. But they persisted through all the drabness of drudgery and the violence of persecution, and that is greater proof of the indomitableness of the Jewish character than the rapture that greeted the first rumours of returning from captivity. So must it be with us. Good as it is for us to soar aloft from time to time on the wings of prophecy in one form or another, it is a greater test of our religion that we plod along life's common road in self-possession, "the head cool, the face forward, and every footfall upon firm ground." The romance of a special mission will best justify itself in equipping men and women for the routine and the commonplace that must follow. It is not at the start, but at the end, that the merit of a movement is demonstrated. "Be thou faithful unto death."

THE VALUE OF FIDELITY.

This question of fidelity is so serious and far-reaching that I cannot find utterance at all adequate to set it forth. It matters tremendously to others than yourself. There are those in your home, in your Church, in your neighbourhood, who are helped to hold on to Christian ideals by the fact that you remain loyal and staunch. If you relax and show signs of weariness and vacillation, you are making it harder for them to persevere. "For their sakes I sanctify myself." For their sakes you will try with God's help, to press forward without faltering. If at times the road is rough and the spirit droops you know where to turn for fresh vigour and renewal.

This dogged tenacity is also of infinite worth to ourselves. The road we are travelling is not all level. We are often on sloping ground. Once we begin to yield, to fail in fidelity to the first fine impulse, the tendency will be to slide downwards until we sink into habits that will blur our ideals and corrupt our souls. That is why no man can estimate the importance of clinging to those aspirations which possessed us at the outset of an effort to cultivate the Christian character.

But if the law of acceleration downwards warns us against beginning to slip back, its counterpart gives us every encouragement. The longer we hold on to our ideals and the further we travel towards the prize of our high calling in Christ Jesus, the stronger and safer we become. Our mode of thinking and acting steadily hardens into habits. As the days and months and years pass the tendency

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of character is to become fixed and permanent. If we are faithful to the vision and experience of a Heaven-sent message that moved us to swear allegiance to Jesus Christ, we shall increasingly partake of Him and progressively grow in His likeness. That is what Jesus is calling us to by His own example. He saw from the outset a highway through human life—a way of thinking and speaking and acting that alone would please and satisfy the Father—and He clung to it, regardless of the cost, until all was accomplished. “It is finished.” From the height of His achievement He calls us to be likewise loyal to the first fine rapture. It is not “go on,” but “come on” that we hear from His lips. And what He calls us to do He enables us to do by the gift of the Holy Spirit. The soul is strengthened and reinforced for its noble quest. We can by His grace continue and persevere until we attain such perfect union with Him that nothing can separate us. Sustained fidelity leads to attainment.

THE REWARD.

“I will give thee the crown of life.” God definitely promises a reward to those who persevere to the end. The New Testament in various ways makes that abundantly clear. This fact seems to some to weaken the claims of Christianity. They consider that the prospect of reward and punishment interferes quite unfairly with the intrinsic value of religion. A hundred years ago it may well be that heaven and hell played far too large a part in the ministry of the Word. To-day, in our tire-

some way of swinging from one extreme to another, reward is seldom mentioned in book or pulpit. Yet it is surely an integral part of our faith that in a world beyond this one, where God reigns without hindrance, there are equitable compensations, so that those who have merely sought to have a good time in this life without regard to the value of the soul may learn wisdom, and those who have really tried to cultivate our Christian graces—not without sacrifice—shall be rewarded with fuller joy and happiness than is possible here on earth. Personally, I think we ought to make it plainer, in the interest of truth, that God is neither impotent nor deceivable, or, to use the strong words of St. Paul, “God is not mocked.” He has a law which is inexorable with reference to the consequences of conduct and character—“Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap.” Frankly, it comes to this—if you are morally feeble and unfaithful, making no real effort to fulfil God’s purpose for yourself or your fellowmen, you will assuredly pass on to a world that will burn and pain you unutterably in the process of teaching you the better way; whereas if you are now pressing forward on the road of Christian living, cultivating in yourself and promoting wherever possible those qualities which have eternal value, you shall be rewarded with a sense of joy and life such as we on earth have not the mind to imagine. “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him.”

“I will give thee the crown of life.” An astute

commentator has remarked that this crown of life is not so much a royal diadem as a garland of festivity. The essence of it is sharing much more than hitherto the beauty and the glory of the life of God Himself, never more to be separated from Him. That is the real reward. Let us keep it steadily in view. It will hearten us on many a hard day, and was intended to do so. We shall plod along the road of Christian living with greater courage and resolution because we know it is not a blind alley, but that it leads to green and pleasant pastures. Equipped and sustained by the Church's ministry, we shall persevere, till "the shades lengthen, and the evening comes, and the busy world is hushed, the fever of life is over, and our work done." Then, God in His mercy will indeed crown us with the unfading garland of heavenly festivity, and everlasting joy shall be upon our heads.

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